Audiences and Participants: Researching Theatre Users at Contact, Manchester

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| LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS                                                                 | 4 |
| LIST OF FIGURES                                                                       | 5 |
| LIST OF TABLES                                                                        | 6 |
| ABSTRACT                                                                              | 7 |
| DECLARATION                                                                           | 8 |
| COPYRIGHT STATEMENT                                                                   | 9 |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS                                                                      | 10 |
| THE AUTHOR                                                                            | 11 |

**PART 1**

1 **CHAPTER 1 - AN INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCHING NEW THEATRE PARADIGMS** ... 12

1.1 AIMS ................................................................................................................. 14
1.2 PURPOSE ............................................................................................................... 20
1.3 CONTACT’S USERS .............................................................................................. 25
1.4 CONTACT’S USERS CHALLENGE TRADITIONAL AUDIENCE RESEARCH ......................... 30
1.5 MULTI-METHOD RESEARCH ................................................................................... 39
1.6 PARTICIPATION ................................................................................................. 40
1.7 THE ‘CLASSIC PARADIGM’ .................................................................................... 42
1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW ........................................................................................... 48

2 **CHAPTER 2 - WHAT IS CONTACT?** ...................................................................... 60

2.1 A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO CONTACT’S HISTORY, 1966-1998 .......................... 70
2.2 CONTACT YOUNG ACTOR’S COMPANY (CYAC) ...................................................... 82

3 **CHAPTER 3 - METHODS OF RESEARCH** ................................................................ 85

3.1 APPROACHES FROM OUTSIDE TRADITIONAL AUDIENCE RESEARCH ....................... 86
3.1.1 Participant Observation ............................................................................... 88
3.1.2 Walking Fieldwork ....................................................................................... 89
3.1.3 Visual Methods ............................................................................................ 90
3.1.4 Creative Workshops .................................................................................... 94
3.1.5 Focus groups ................................................................................................ 97
3.2 TRADITIONAL AUDIENCE RESEARCH METHODS ................................................ 97
3.2.1 Qualitative, semi-structured Interviews ....................................................... 97
3.2.2 Video Interviews and Questionnaires .......................................................... 101
3.3 THE RESEARCH JOURNEY AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE THEORETICAL APPROACH ....................................................................................................................... 111

**PART 2**

4 **CHAPTER 4 – LONG-TERM AND CASUAL USERS AS PARTICIPANTS** ..................... 119

4.1 THEATRE USERS AND PARTICIPATION ................................................................ 122
4.2 CASE STUDIES .................................................................................................... 129
4.3  What is a ‘role’? ................................................................. 133
  4.3.1  Roles of theatre users.......................................................... 134
4.4  Theatre conventions and long-term users’ roles in Memories of the Rain ............... 138
4.5  Users’ roles in Moston D.N.A. ......................................................... 144
4.6  Evaluation of participant observation and visual methods...................................... 151

5  CHAPTER 5 - THEATRE USERS AS COMMUNITIES ...................................... 155
  5.1  ‘Contact Careers’ ......................................................................... 157
  5.2  Community .................................................................................. 159
  5.3  Extended Interviews...................................................................... 168
  5.4  Evaluation of extended interviews ..................................................... 185

6  CHAPTER 6 – RESEARCHING CASUAL USERS THROUGH CREATIVE METHODS ...... 193
  6.1  Innovative Research Methods............................................................. 197
  6.2  Case Studies................................................................................. 199
    6.2.1  Loreto College ....................................................................... 199
    6.2.2  People in Glass Cases Shouldn’t Throw Stones .......................... 224

7  CHAPTER 7 – RESEARCHING USERS THROUGH ESTABLISHED METHODS ........ 239
  7.1  Short, qualitative video interviews ..................................................... 240
  7.2  Some longitudinal aspects of People in Glass Cases Shouldn’t Throw Stones ............ 248
  7.3  Evaluation of Research Methods....................................................... 273
    7.3.1  Short, qualitative (snapshot) interviews ...................................... 274
    7.3.2  Questionnaire and follow-on telephone interviews ......................... 276

8  CHAPTER 8 – CONCLUSION ..................................................................... 280
  8.1  Contact users and their practices ......................................................... 285
  8.2  Remaining questions and future audience research ....................................... 287

APPENDICES ..................................................................................... 291
  Appendix A ....................................................................................... 291
  Appendix B ....................................................................................... 293
  Appendix C ......................................................................................... 295
  Appendix D ......................................................................................... 297

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................. 299

81.133 words (permission granted to exceed word limit)
**List of Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>ALD</td>
<td>Alcoholic liver disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A/R/T</td>
<td>Artist/ Researcher/ Teacher, Topographer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLTU</td>
<td>Contact long-term user</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Contact (Theatre), Manchester</td>
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<tr>
<td>CYAC</td>
<td>Contact Young Actors’ Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DJ</td>
<td>Disk Jockey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.N.A.</td>
<td>Dynamic New Approach (outreach project in Moston)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HND</td>
<td>Higher National Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC</td>
<td>Spoken-Word Artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOSI</td>
<td>Museum of Industry and Science (Manchester)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moston D.N.A.</td>
<td>see D.N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panda</td>
<td>Performing Arts Network and Development Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA system</td>
<td>Personal Address system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TfD</td>
<td>Theatre for Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIE</td>
<td>Theatre-in-Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 1 View from Contact onto Oxford Road; ................................................................. 60
Figure 2 Contact’s characteristic air vents, ...................................................................... 61
Figure 3 Contact’s Upper Foyer, ....................................................................................... 62
Figure 4 Contacting the World Preview Night; ................................................................. 63
Figure 5 Contacting the World 2012; .............................................................................. 63
Figure 6 Space 1; .............................................................................................................. 68
Figure 7 Contacting the World 2012: CYAC and Arts-in-Action Wordsmiths (Trinidad); ............................................................................................................................... 82
Figure 8 Rehearsal of Memories of the Rain ................................................................. 139
Figure 9 Memories of the Rain: team training............................................................... 141
Figure 10 Memories of the Rain - the set .................................................................. 143
Figure 11 Memories of the Rain: dress rehearsal........................................................ 143
Figure 12 Moston D.N.A. - street art wall .................................................................. 145
Figure 13 Moston D.N.A. - young people MC-ING..................................................... 146
Figure 14 Moston D.N.A. - the space .......................................................................... 148
Figure 15 Moston D.N.A. - young people MC-ING..................................................... 149
Figure 16 Moston D.N.A. - street art wall .................................................................. 151
List of Tables

TABLE 1 PINE AND GILMORE’S CHANGES IN ECONOMIC OFFERINGS ................................................. 195
Abstract

When people ‘go to the theatre’ we know that they are audiences. When young people go to Contact, however, they might be audiences, performers and/or theatre makers – they might play all three or more roles. Contact’s users blur existing concepts and terminology. When we want to know more about theatre audiences, audience research offers models based on the distinction between audiences and theatre makers. If we want to know more about Contact’s users, however, a model reflecting the blending of audiences and theatre makers’ roles has yet to be developed. This thesis engages with Contact’s users. It maps some of their multiple roles and experiences by asking two main questions: What are the practices of the people attending Contact and how can these practices be researched?

A range of qualitative methods is necessary in order to investigate the wide variety of Contact’s users’ roles and experiences. Individual and group interviews are drawn from audience research, creative workshops are drawn from communication studies, and participant observation and visual research from the social sciences. Finally, a new method, Walking Fieldwork, is adapted for the use in theatre.

A number of case studies are employed to investigate Contact’s users. These case studies involve the observation of young actors during rehearsals and performances, the observation of participants in an outreach project, the investigation of audiences’ experiences of two productions, and several short post-show interviews with general Contact audiences.

This study found evidence that the relationship between theatre makers and audiences is changing. The term ‘theatre user’ is introduced as it opens up an area of overlap between the two and fits contemporary practices at Contact more closely. Contact’s users function as communities, participants and co-creators. The descriptions of these roles and experiences contained in this thesis are understood as an initial exploration into practices of contemporary theatre users. However, further research is needed to build a more detailed understanding of these practices.

In terms of research methods, this study found that the academic field of audience research needs to develop methods which are sensitive to both the backgrounds of theatre users and the theatrical context. The argument is put forward that audience research should become more aware of methods for the investigation of human experience and should enter into a ‘methods-dialogue’ with other academic fields of study.
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Part 1

1 Chapter 1 - An Introduction to Researching New Theatre Paradigms

The very ubiquity of the theatrical in human life and culture – and, conversely, the apparent ability of theatre, as a human activity, to absorb all other human activities into itself - make it so varied and complex a phenomenon as to test the limits of any mode of critical understanding. (Helbo 1991:vii)

The search for harmonious theoretical frameworks to capture contemporary realities might have been an important fantasy of the homo academicus, but it also might not do the analysis of these realities any favours. (Carpentier 2011:351)

This thesis has its beginning in a conversation between two academics and the artistic director of Contact Theatre in the years 2005/06. They had noticed that existing audience research methods suited mainstream repertory theatres but not Contact. It was clear to them that Contact’s audiences were different from those in mainstream repertory theatres. These three people, therefore, felt that new methods were needed. Such methods would help Contact to better understand its audiences, who could not be reached and questioned in the same way as audiences of mainstream repertory theatres. In 2008, the search for new audience research methods started as a collaborative PhD between the University of Manchester and Contact.

Fast forward to the year 2012: on 20th September, the results of this research project were presented to Contact’s board. In a conversation after the presentation between one of the initiators and the writer of this study it was recognised that the outcomes of the study were, in fact, different from those which had been anticipated. On the one hand, the thesis did introduce and experiment with new audience research methods. However, in its course, the thesis had
shifted in unforeseen ways. The search for Contact’s ‘core’, and what distinguished the people who go there from audiences of mainstream repertory theatres, had become a second and powerful driver. The initial emphasis on ‘methods’ slowly shifted to the search for Contact’s ‘core’. In time, the search for the ‘core’ became dominant and changed the character and direction of this study.

This development within this study was accompanied by at least two fundamental changes in its economic and cultural context. Firstly, the economic climate in the UK, as all over the world, changed drastically due to the Global Financial Crisis in 2008. The Arts Council England responded to this development and changed some of its priorities. It concentrated its capacities on organisations which were considered important for a National Portfolio and also made some other alterations. This changed the funding climate for the arts in the UK and also impacted on Contact. Secondly, spurred on by a much more competitive climate for arts funding, a change of thinking was beginning to emerge among Contact staff and its board in regard to the evaluation of its work. Almost imperceptibly, qualitative thinking had made its way into evaluation processes, which had traditionally been dominated by quantitative characteristics. It had been recognised that established ways of evaluating Contact’s work, in order to justify and apply for new funding, was mostly ‘quantifying’ peripheral activities rather than Contact’s core participative activities. Numbers of audiences and people who had taken part in Contact’s programmes were traditionally seen as a way to assess whether public subsidies had been well spent. However, dissatisfaction with these established ways of evaluation led Contact’s Creative Development team to seek for creative and qualitative ways to account for young people’s activities. In 2011,
they commissioned a company to create a computer programme able to track and represent young people’s journeys through Contact.

These changes - in the economic and arts funding climate as well as the inclusion of qualitative thinking in evaluation processes at Contact - have run in parallel to this study. However, they also form the background to the shift in emphasis from ‘methods’ to Contact’s ‘core’ within the work. This study makes it clear, then, that Contact differs in more ways from mainstream repertory theatres than had been recognised in the past. In which ways Contact and the people who frequent it are different will be demonstrated in the remainder of this thesis.

Audiences, users and spectators – these three key terms need to be explained before the thesis starts. Firstly, the term ‘audience’ will be used in this study to describe people who visit mainstream repertory theatres and other formal theatre events such as operas and musicals. Secondly, the term ‘user’ refers to people who frequent Contact Theatre, Manchester. A distinction is made between long-term users – those who use Contact’s services frequently and for a long time – and casual users, who go to Contact less often and who might to take part in their participatory programmes in the future. Thirdly, the term ‘spectator’ will be used to describe theatre goers in general and also in historical circumstances. The term is used when a distinction between audiences of mainstream repertory theatres and users of Contact would be unhelpful or misleading.

1.1 Aims

The overarching aim of this thesis is to argue that Contact operates outside of the ‘classic paradigm’. Its users do not fit the ‘classic paradigm’, and, therefore, new
methods are needed to investigate their practice. The term ‘classic paradigm’ will be explained in a dedicated section later on.

To meet this aim this study is going to look at those people who go through Contact’s doors. It will be argued that Contact users’ roles and experiences differ from audiences in mainstream repertory theatres. These differences can mainly be observed in the roles they each play in the theatre and the experiences they have while they are there.

Audience and reception studies have long studied ‘spectators’ and have conceptualised their practices in several ways. In contrast, attendees of Contact Theatre, from now ‘Contact’, who take on multiple roles, do not conform to classic definitions. This creates a triple deficiency: first, there is a distinct lack of terminology referring to users’ complex practices; second, there is a lack of conceptual frameworks to understand what people do when they play different roles; and thirdly, methods to investigate complex practices are also lacking. This thesis addresses two of these gaps by exploring participatory practices and investigating new methods to study them. It asks the following research questions: What are the roles and experiences of Contact’s users and how can they be researched? Users’ ‘roles’ and experiences and ‘methods to research them’ are, therefore, the foci of this work.

This thesis is divided into two parts; the first part introduces the arguments that Contact’s users create new practices and, therefore, new methods are needed to research them. The first chapter gives an overview of the research topic, the second describes Contact, and the third chapter describes the methods of research.

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1 Within Communication Studies audiences have, for example, been conceptualised as ‘passive’ in the Effects model (Hypodermic needle model and Two-steps Flow model). Additionally, audiences have also been understood as ‘active’ in mass communication research and in the uses and gratification tradition.
The second part of the thesis – chapters four to seven – use seven case studies to describe and explain new practices at Contact and they also explore new methods for researching Contact’s users.

This research project revolves around people who go through Contact’s doors. They can roughly be divided into two groups. Some people utilise Contact in ways which classic theatre audiences utilise mainstream repertory theatres. They come back time and again ‘in the role of audiences’. Others, however, make use of Contact in different ways. They often engage with Contact over long periods of time and take up a variety of roles: as participants, performers, directors, stage managers, technicians, producers, ambassadors, workshop leaders, young artists, employees or in a combination of these roles. It is relatively common for long-term users to ‘go in’ playing one role and leave Contact – after some considerable time – having played a number of other roles as well. This thesis investigates both groups, though it prioritises people who stay for longer and perform multiple roles.

This thesis is taking a number of risks – the biggest of which might be that it embarks on several new territories. Firstly, this work interrogates ‘people who go through the door of a participatory theatre’. It therefore investigates a ‘shape shifting’ group of people within a working, contemporary, participatory youth theatre. This group and its practices have, so far, rarely been recognised in the field of Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies. This diverse group of people, like the theatre it operates in, is constantly changing and defies easy categorisation. Secondly, this evolving group of theatre goers demands new terms; it cannot be usefully understood with the help of terminology derived from mainstream repertory theatres. New terms are needed because Contact and its
work have departed from the classic theatre paradigm. The ‘classic paradigm’
contains deep-rooted assumptions about theatre goers in mainstream repertory
theatres and what they have historically been understood to do. Thirdly, since
theatre goers are conceptualised in a new way, audience research and reception
studies are unable to contribute meaningfully to this investigation. Fourthly, in
order to theorise this group of theatre goers several methods from other fields of
study have been employed. New and emerging methods bring risks to this study,
especially in a field that is more used to dealing with interpretations or third-party
accounts (for example, from theatre critics) about theatre goers. Fifthly, and
finally, this thesis leaves the traditional hermeneutic focus of many works in the
field to one side and seeks stimulation from non-interpretive methods and
approaches to research (Gumbrecht 2004; Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006;
Gumbrecht 2006; Gauntlett 2007; Thompson 2009). Furthermore, this study has a
keen eye for ‘presence effects’, as this makes it possible to talk about theatre users
without concentrating on either their social characteristics or the construction of
meaning. Presence effects, in this study, are understood to include everything that
happens when young people are in the presence of each other at Contact or its
events. Classic theatre activities are part of it. However, presence effects include
equally the time young people socialise with each other in the Lounge, do technical
work, facilitate workshops or organise a festival.

**Short research synopsis**

In order to appreciate the strength and limits of the ‘journey’ entailed in this thesis,
a short synopsis is offered. In 2008, work on this project started with a strong
orientation towards ‘audiences’. The initial working title reflects this: “New Paradigms for Researching Theatre Audiences at Contact Theatre, Manchester.” This firm orientation towards ‘methods to research Contact audiences’ gave the work its first major direction of travel. In this period the work focused on the people who watch performances at Contact. Difficulties surfaced when the spotlight on ‘audiences’ began to jar with Contact’s participatory working practices, because it side-lined participants in its programmes. The first phase directed attention towards audiences. Contact’s participatory mission, however, redirected the investigation towards ‘participants’. The tension between these two terms and the two groups with different practices within one theatre accompanied the study for a long time. As the focus of this study was Contact, participants needed to be at the heart of the investigation. Consequently, the study fundamentally changed its direction away from ‘audiences’ and towards ‘participants’. Almost all fieldwork was conducted while the focus of the work was shifting. Some of the fieldwork, however, was also directed towards people who came to see Contact’s performances. It emerged that to refocus on ‘participants’ alone did not solve the conflict between ‘audiences’ and ‘participants’ because this tended to neglect the former. In another major shift of direction, it was decided that both audiences and participants would be joined to become ‘audience/participants’. This, however, did not solve the problem either, because the two groups had lost their distinctive features. Also the question of the division of labour was, for example, not addressed by joining up the two terms. It was recognised that terminology itself forms part of the problem. At first, the terms

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2 The distinction between ‘audiences’, ‘users’ and ‘spectators’, as indicated in the first paragraph of the thesis, was arrived retrospectively in the writing process. This distinction could, therefore, not inform the research stages referred to here.
‘audiences’ and ‘participants’ were applied to the people at Contact. The terms did not cover the users’ activities. It was then recognised that the focus needed to be on the people who go through Contact’s doors. Terms for their actions needed to be subsequently developed.

At the same time it was recognised that most audience research largely focuses on the social composition of audiences of mainstream repertory theatres. Reception studies, by contrast, focus on audiences’ receptive processes; this usually investigates how audiences of mainstream repertory theatres make meaning of what they have come to watch at the theatre (Sauter 1997; Sauter 2002; Tulloch 2005). Neither of these research fields dealt with theatre goers and their activities in a theatre outside of the auditorium. It therefore came to light that not only a new term for audiences/ participants was needed but that traditional audience and reception research could meaningfully contribute little to this study. The term ‘theatre user’ was coined as a consequence of the above realisations. This term freed the people who go through Contact’s doors from the confines of existing terminology. The term ‘user’ was clearly useful for this investigation as it operated outside of the traditional theatre paradigm. A user, for example, uses a service offered to her in a way she sees fit. Several services can be offered by the same institution. Users, regardless of the roles they take within the service institution remain users. After terminology, another question surfaced. If users are the focus, what should this thesis investigate about users? It was then decided that the investigation should concentrate on users’ ‘roles’ and ‘experiences’, with a keen eye on the research methods. Through reflection it emerged that Contact offers a ‘virtual, experiential space’ within which users can try out different roles and have different experiences of theatre making. The
discovery of this ‘virtual, experiential space’ is one of the main findings of this investigation. To conclude this short synopsis, it can be said that only the focus on the ‘people who go through Contact’s door’ remained constant during the investigation. They were interviewed, observed, photographed, videoed, sent on research journeys and took part in creative workshops. My view of the people and Contact has, however, fundamentally changed in the process. This personal research ‘journey’ makes the strengths and difficulties of researching people in a living and breathing arts organisation recognisable, and can, it is hoped, usefully contribute to the framing of the investigation.

1.2 Purpose

Why is it important to look at the roles of people who go through Contact’s doors? There are at least three reasons. Firstly, Contact’s participatory theatre practices respond to the need of mainstream repertory theatres to mirror the make-up of the British population in its attendees. It is seen as increasingly central by arts funders that organisations cater for the cultural needs of much wider cross-sections of the population. Contact already successfully engages with a variety of communities and age groups which many mainstream repertory theatres find hard to reach. It appeals to different people because it has different aims, embraces different values, and is, generally, committed to reducing the barriers to participation often associated with mainstream theatres. For example, in its work, Contact makes no distinction between the relative value of professional productions, participative and youth work. Thereby, it questions existing distinctions between professional, participative, and young people’s theatre practices. Other theatres could use the ‘Contact’s model’ or some of its principles
to respond to issues which arts organisations need to tackle if they want to remain significant and justify public subsidies. In this way, the ‘Contact model’ can provide guidance for theatres to attract communities which are currently beyond their reach. In other words, those who are currently “[not] extraordinarily well-educated, whose incomes are [not] very high [and] who are [not] predominantly in the professions” (Baumol and Bowen 1973:469). Contact’s model can also provide guidance to diversifying staff, programming for different communities, accommodating the needs of different communities, and embracing sets of different values. Secondly, Contact is at the cutting edge of contemporary theatre. Its participatory theatre practices build on developments in experimental theatre, Theatre–in-Education, community-, youth-, and performance arts of the last 40 to 50 years. These practices have produced, and are continuing to generate, multifaceted and complex processes which broaden and question the classic theatre paradigm. For example, multifaceted practices in participatory settings challenge the relationship between audiences and performers in mainstream repertory theatres. Whereas the relationship for the latter are well established and relatively stable, the relationships of the former are emerging and flexible. It is therefore necessary to study emerging participatory practices carefully as they provide a testing ground for the wider theatre ecology (Kershaw 2007). Thirdly, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nation in 1989 (Lansdown 2010:11). This convention details the rights of children and young people under the age of eighteen to directly participate in all matters which concern them. Participation at Contact tends towards the maximalist democratic participation in a cultural field and strives towards meaningful engagement, learning and development of young people in the theatre. Through the Convention
of the Child the UK government is obliged to ensure participation of children and young people. Contact is one of the few organisations which can be said to already implement this convention in its model and should, therefore, be studied closely so that other art organisations can profit from their practices.

**Six suppositions**

This thesis rests on a number of suppositions, which are going to be briefly considered here. The first supposition is that theatre in the UK is changing (see among others: Davies 1987; Brine, Keidan et al. 2007). This change can be most clearly detected in alternative and non-mainstream theatres. The concepts which theorise theatrical activity need to be adapted to reflect changed practices. The term ‘audience,’ for example, mainly refers to people who engage with the ‘classic paradigm’ in mainstream repertory theatres. Emerging practices of theatre goers in alternative and non-mainstream settings like Contact are rarely recognised. There is a need for terms which specifically concentrate on emerging practices. However, it is not only a question of how theatre users’ activities can be better understood by theatre scholars and theoreticians. The question of ‘how we know’ is becoming increasingly important. Getting to know how contemporary users conceptualise their own theatre activities can, for example, enhance insight. It is the second supposition that, when researching theatre users, it is essential to look beyond the duration of the performance. The theatrical event in its entirety needs to be taken into account when users’ experiences are researched. This includes the time preceding and following performances. The third supposition is that audience research in the theatre is based on the ‘classic paradigm’. In order to go beyond its confines new concepts need to adequately reflect contemporary theatre users’ activities.
The forth supposition is that current audience research is in need of more and different research methods to adequately deal with the complexity of users’ activities in the theatre. Research methods are likely to influence outcomes of research. It is argued that the desire to investigate young and alternative theatre users calls for openness to different research methods. Modern technology and creative methods will be employed, and thereby tested, for their usefulness. Traditional drama, theatre, and performance methods are – generally speaking – hermeneutically based. The application of research methods from other fields, such as the social sciences or the arts, is useful in looking beyond the hermeneutic field. The combination of existing research methods with creative approaches to research could support this. The fifth supposition is that audience research in the participatory theatre set-ups requires a different relationship between researchers and the researched. In many field studies, researchers conceptualise themselves as outsiders who investigate practices of insiders. Research in a participatory theatre environment like Contact makes it necessary for the researcher to be an ‘insider’. The power relations constituted by research situations of this kind themselves need to be acknowledged. The sixth, and last, supposition is the fact that traditional theatre spectators in the UK are changing. While there are attempts to sustain traditional theatre patronage, there is a need for new groups of people to support theatres. One reason for revisiting the term ‘theatre audiences’ is connected with the changing demography of the UK. Between the late nineteenth century and the 1970s, it could safely be assumed people frequenting theatres in the UK were mainly white and from a well-off background. This is no longer the case. Black and ethnic minorities make up roughly ten percent of the
people living in Greater Manchester alone. Black and Ethnic minority professionals and their children are playing a significant role in Manchester’s social and cultural life. In order to attract and sustain spectators and participants from ethnic backgrounds theatres need to, firstly, adapt their programming and their way of operation to accommodate a changing populace.

The previous passage has briefly mentioned six suppositions which will underpin this project. It has shown that for a theatre to follow tried-and-tested methods does little to widen its appeal. In contrast, exploring new and experimental forms and performance conventions might establish different relationships between producers, patrons, performers and participants. It might, on the other hand, do little to bring in new users from ethnic backgrounds and people interested in ‘alternative forms of theatre’. It remains a challenge to find those means and practices which bring traditional audiences and theatre users together. This thesis will represent one of the many necessary steps to address the changing face of theatre and their users in the UK in the twenty first century.

The reminder of this introduction will present the main concept of this thesis in more detail. After Contact’s users have been established as the centre of the investigation participation, the ‘classic paradigm’ and multi-method research will be introduced as important for this study. The introduction will end with a review of the relevant literature and a short introduction to each of the following chapters.

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4 Similar tendencies are evident in Western Europe and North America.
1.3 Contact's users

It is unusual to use the term ‘users’ in a theatre context. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a user as:

\[\text{[a] person who has or makes use of a thing, esp. regularly; a person who employs or practices something.}\] (Murray 1970)

This thesis will henceforth refer to Contact’s attendees as ‘users’. The term ‘users’ refers, firstly, to long-term users and, secondly, also to casual users. Long-term users are engaging with Contact over longer periods of time. The minimum period could be seen as two to three years, one of which is typically spent at the Contact Young Actors Company. This company will be discussed in more detail later. In contrast, Contact’s casual users engage in more infrequent patterns. They might attend the theatre for a performance once or twice a year, or utilise the building for other reasons than theatre, before they engage with its performances.

There is, so far, only a very limited understanding of the term ‘theatre users’. The most recent theatre lexicon for example, Pavis’ Dictionary of the Theatre (1998) alongside other introductory theatre texts, such as Balme's Introduction to Theatre Studies (2010) or Leach’s Theatre Studies (2008), do not mention the term ‘theatre user’ at all. Since such elementary questions about theatre users still need to be solved, this study is as much concerned with theatre users as with methods to research them.

In the context of this study, young people who use Contact for a long time are referred to as Contact’s long-term users. They are using a virtual, experiential, and participatory space which is exclusive to Contact and which does not exist in mainstream repertory theatres. Long-term users utilise Contact’s offers most fully. Many take part in programmes, see performances, find part-time employment,
assist and run workshops, carry out ambassadorial functions, and also develop a number of other professional capacities.

The division of labour at Contact is flexible, if one applies a long-term view. In contrast, audiences of repertory theatre companies are likely to assume the same role again and again. They are encouraged to come back as audiences. Most repertory theatre companies are built around a fixed distribution of labour.

Contact’s long-term and casual users can be seen as participants, community members, co-creators, and co-constructors. This is the reason why their roles and experiences must be investigated. It is assumed that users experience their involvement on different levels and through different roles. It therefore makes sense in this context to explore users’ roles and the multiplicity of their experiences, rather than a singularity signified by a relationship of exclusion. I am going to unpack this important point in chapters four, five, six and seven.

Contact’s long-term users are, in essence, the user group which is most central to the operation of Contact. They are, in the words of Contact’s business plan, those young people “who are at the heart of everything we do” (Contact 2010). There are many other user groups and individuals which frequent Contact for a variety of reasons. Some use the Contact Lounge, others the computers, some visit exhibitions, others participate in different Contact programmes and, last but not least, some people frequent performances at Contact on a casual basis. The interests and needs of Contact’s long-term users, however, could be seen as guiding Contact policy makers and staff in their decisions on how the organisation is run and which aims it pursues. This group can also be called a ‘working community’ as they share a (cultural) domain and a common practice of learning (Wenger 2006). It is mainly the ‘community’ which is of interest here. Contact’s
long-term users are aware that they are part of a community of artists and creative practitioners. They have no outwardly visible sign of membership, neither a card nor another reified sign of belonging. Through their artistic and social practices at Contact, however, they form a functioning community. When asked what Contact means to them, most interviewees responded that Contact is like a family or a home\(^5\) (See also interviews with: ES 2009; NG 2010; NN 2010; BMe 2011; MS 2011).

Prior to becoming members of this group, Contact’s long-term users often actively search for a ‘community’ closely related to either their (performing arts-related) craft or their wider cultural interests. In many cases, they were, at the same time, also looking for access to resources and for a ‘place’ in which to develop personally, socially and artistically. Some harbour specific aims upon joining Contact. However, to those using Contact’s offers repeatedly and for a long period of time, belonging to a variety of communities of practices becomes more and more important. Both ‘place’ and ‘community’ are seen by young people as a two sides of the same coin. Many wish to have their needs met in the same location, combining their need to ‘belong’ and their wish to identify with a certain place. Young people also identified Contact as a resource and a ‘hub’.

Contact’s long-term users take part in a number of activities over long periods of time. They are also frequently working part-time at Contact, or in some capacity for Contact, as workshop leaders, creative leaders, or, for example, in

\(^5\) It is interesting to note that those interviewees who have grown up in more conventional families most frequently referred to Contact as a ‘family’. This image most often seemed to refer to feelings of belonging, closeness, reciprocity, support and gratitude. At least one interviewee, whose upbringing differed, used another association. For him Contact is like a ‘home’. Those different understandings point towards idiosyncratic uses of concepts relating to ‘closeness’ and ‘relationality’. Whatever concept was experienced most intensely before is then taken as a ‘standard’ which following experiences are measured against.
ambassadorial functions. Another important sub-group of participants is constituted by the members of Contact’s Young Actors Company (CYAC). Members of this group have to audition for a place and, once accepted, can stay for three trimesters or one year. Another sub-group are the participants in Contact’s programmes, events and festivals. Members of this group take part in a wide variety of activities which Contact offers, in confidence- and skill-building, and in support programmes. Another sub-group of young people who are considered to be participants are working part-time at Contact. They sometimes represent Contact at external events, workshops, conferences, seminars, or symposia. Young people in this group regularly see Contact’s performances, too.

It must be said, though, that the division of Contact’s users into two groups is a device used to conceptualise different user behaviour. Neither is, however, exclusive. On the contrary, the borders of these groups are fuzzy. Members of one group can change between groups or belong to two groups at the same time. This can take place between the two groups and on a long- or short-term basis. For example, some long-term users might, at some stage, due to personal or professional circumstances, only occasionally engage with the organisation. They might, although they are long-term users see, only one performance in a year or lead only one workshop in the same period. Many young people come to Contact as casual users first, before they join a variety of other programmes. Some young people audition for CYAC after they have been casual users and join other programmes. A number of young people who have gone through CYAC stay connected with Contact for a very long time indeed. They frequently lead workshops and become creative consultants, Contact ambassadors, and young artists in their own right.
It can be said that one of the distinguishing features of Contact is the overlap
between those groups. A specific ‘atmosphere’ is created through the coming
together of different groups of people in the same building. The atmosphere
ensuing from this get together, in turn, becomes part of Contact’s overall
experience. Contact’s users, thereby, create some part of the very specific
surroundings which influences the overall atmosphere at Contact. In other words,
the presence of Contact’s long-term users impacts on the overall experience of
casual users.

While this study deals with users, it is especially concerned with Contact’s
long-term users. Contact’s long-term users take up Contact offers for active
participation in its programmes, activities, and, also, in the organisation and
management of the organisation. Most of them are fifteen to twenty five years old.
Contact’s long-term users are a minority within the total number of Contact users.
They are, however, important as Contact builds and models itself around the needs
and aspirations of this specific user group. They are the ‘target’, and their
development is one of the main aims of Contact.6

Contact’s success in delivering this aim is hard to quantify and encounters
problems of ‘measurability’ in a participative performing arts context. One could
argue that Contact succeeds when it manages to educate a sufficient number of
young people who, as a result of becoming emerging artists at Contact, come back
to work with and train new groups of long-term users. One could also argue that
‘success’ could be ‘measured’ by the long-term users’ impact on other institutions
or with specific art projects. However, it is risky to measure ‘impact’ through the

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6 Please also refer to Appendix A in which Contact’s mission statement and its four core ambitions are
mentioned. The ambition most relevant here is: “Inspiring Progress - We will offer young people from a
diverse range of communities, opportunities and support to progress through life changing journeys
from participant to professional artist.” (see also Contact’s Three Year Plan 2011-13)
highly visible success stories and pioneering work, less than through the broad influence Contact’s long-term users have had on a grassroots level, or through less visible impact on their chosen art form or other institutions. Another way of measuring success is through the appreciation of Contact’s model by funders and arts administration bodies such as Arts Council England. Through their appreciation of participatory arts activities they demonstrate a willingness to support this form next to more established forms of cultural engagement. It has to be stressed, though, that some of some of Contact’s cultural practices can be said to be on the fringes of, or outside, the ‘classic paradigm’. Others, however, lie comfortably within the ‘classic paradigm’.

1.4 Contact’s users challenge traditional audience research

The term ‘audience’ is historically determined and different meanings were attached to it in the course of history. However, the theoretical understanding of audiences, even in an advanced and extended form, cannot easily be mapped onto the practices of people engaging with Contact. This ‘collision’ of theatrical practices and theoretical terms produced in Hughes’ terms a ‘decompositional’ moment within the investigation (Hughes, Kidd et al. 2011:188). Such moments occur when “designed and improvised research processes deteriorate in confrontation with experiences that confound expectations of an orderly, rule-bound, habitable universe” (ibid.). The term ‘audiences’, and other established theatre terms, have vexed and obfuscated the present investigation for long periods of time. These terms have pulled the current study time and again towards established ways of thinking about theatre practices and, more importantly, towards the ‘classic paradigm’. However, neither do Contact’s users fit the ‘classic
paradigm’, nor can it be hoped that established methods will solve problems which challenge their principles. The need for new terms and different ways of thinking about people in a theatre on the one hand, and the strong pull towards established ways of ‘researching’ and thinking about audiences has characterised this study. This obfuscation challenged the study to either define known terms in a different way or to coin new terms which better fit the phenomena under investigation.

There are at least three reasons why new methods are needed to research Contact’s users. Firstly, the concept of the ‘audience’ needs to be understood as a largely contested concept. The etymological roots of the word ‘audience’ are in the Latin verb *audire* ‘to hear’. This suggests, as Freshwater (2009) points out, that audiences at certain moments in the past have been primarily theorized as listeners rather than viewers. The ancient Greek word for theatre ‘*theatron,*’ on the other hand, means ‘place of seeing’. How the people populating the theatres have become to be known as audiences is a question worth following up in the future. Communication scholar McQuail suggests that:

> [t]he problem surrounding the concept [of audiences] stem mainly from the fact that a single and simple word is being applied to an increasingly diverse and complex reality, to alternative and competing theoretical formulations. One commentator has gone so far to suggest that “what is occurring is the breakdown of the *referent* [stress in the original] for the word audience ... from both the humanities and the social sciences.

(McQuail 1997: 1-2)

Secondly, audiences in the twenty-first century are involved in theatres in many different audience ‘modes’. Audiences can watch a play or participate in a play for a short period of time or be involved in complex games in which they act as performers and performers become facilitators. Thirdly, a further barrier to the
better understanding of audiences lies in the confusion between individual and group responses which Freshwater and Leach, among others, comment upon (Leach 2008; Freshwater 2009).

Keeping these complications in mind, which methodological approaches can be used to research Contact users? Punch (2005), Balnaves (2001) and Berger (2000) generally agree that quantitative methods are used to investigate socio-demographic attributes, attitudes, behaviours and the links and causal relationships between them. Quantitative data allows for a broad study, involving a great number of subjects, thereby enhancing the generalisation of the results. It can also allow for great objectivity and accuracy of results. Generally, quantitative methods are designed to provide summaries of data that support generalisations about the phenomenon under study. In order to accomplish this, quantitative research usually involves few variables, many cases, and employs prescribed procedures to ensure validity and reliability. Using standards means that the research can be replicated, and then analysed and compared with similar studies. Kruger (2003) confirms that 'quantitative methods allow us to summarize vast sources of information and facilitate comparisons across categories and over time'. Personal bias can be avoided by researchers keeping a 'distance' from participating subjects and employing subjects unknown to them.

In contrast, qualitative methods such as open-ended interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic observation are generally used to investigate people’s understandings, perceptions, feelings, motivations, and desires (Davis and Michelle 2011:560). Guba clearly sets the area of human inquiry apart from the physical sciences:
All problems are de facto local: inquiry must be decentralised to the local context. By deregulation I meant to indicate a movement away from the restrictive conventional rules of the research game, the overweening concerns with validity, reliability, objectivity and generalizability. ... These methodological criteria can have meaning only within a paradigm of enquiry that is defined in the conventional way, and, specifically, based on the premise of a concrete, tangible reality. However useful the premise of such a reality might be in the physical sciences ... it is simply irrelevant in the arena of human inquiry, for in that arena there is no tangible reality; everything social inquirers study depends on mental constructions and mental interpretations. Thus the usual distinction between ontology (the nature of reality) and epistemology (how we come to know that reality) collapses: Inquirers do not “discover” knowledge by watching nature do its thing from behind a one-way mirror; rather, it is literally created by the inquirer with the “object” (construct) into which they have inquired. Whatever may be the criteria for research quality in this arena, the conventional criteria clearly do not fit. (Guba In: Stringer 2007, VI-VII)

Silverman (2009) and Denzin (2008 (b)) largely agree that qualitative research, in general provides depth and detail looking deeper than analysing ranks and counts by recording attitudes, feelings and behaviours. Qualitative methods create openness by encouraging research respondents to expand on their responses. This can open up new topic areas which were not initially considered. Qualitative methods often attempt to simulate respondents’ individual experiences. In this way a detailed picture can be built up about why people act in certain ways and their feelings about these actions. Lastly, qualitative methods attempt to avoid pre-judgements. If used alongside quantitative data collection, they can often explain why a particular response was given.
Both qualitative and quantitative methods in audience and reception research, however, are rooted in understanding spectators and performers as opposite ends of a spectrum. If this dualism is challenged – through users playing several roles – methods which are able to deal with more this complexity are needed. However, methods which are able to cope with users’ multiple roles and personal complex experiences have yet to be developed. In the meantime, this study adapts sociological and multi-disciplinary methods: participant observation, visual ethnography, multi-mode interviews, creative workshops and Walking Fieldwork. These methods are used in a multi-disciplinary way and, it is hoped, overcome some of the limitations of traditional audience and reception research methods.

The majority of reception research methods have been developed to investigate the viewing experiences of TV and media audiences (Morley 1980; Ang 1985; Gauntlett and Hill 1999; Barker 2006). Reception-based methods, however, largely fail to address the main concerns of this study: users and their roles and experiences. One of the main reasons for this is that audience and reception research is mainly focussed on and the effects of performances. In contrast, users largely play their roles and make their experiences outside of performances but mostly inside a theatre building. Traditional audience and reception research is essentially concerned with what happens in the auditorium. User research, however, takes place in many spaces inside and outside of the theatre in: rehearsal rooms, found spaces, outreach settings, public places, offices, foyers, backstage, conference venues and on festival stages. The complex and ‘messy’ situation of Contact’s users – created through playing more than one role in the theatre – challenges conventional audience research methods. Users of a participatory
theatre are a complex and ‘messy’ phenomenon in the way Law refers to messy phenomena in the social sciences:

[W]e are dealing with a slippery phenomenon, one that change[s] shape, and [is] fuzzy around the edges. [W]e are dealing with something that [isn’t] and [doesn’t] have a single form. [I]t [is] fluid [... and] ephemeral in any given form, flipping from one configuration to another, dancing like a flame.  

(Law 2006:5)

This study explores users’ roles and experiences. For this reason, many of the reception-based audience research methods and methodologies which are grounded in fixed roles can contribute little to this study. Methods and methodologies based in the reception tradition are, therefore, ‘challenged’ here.

Audience researchers and marketing teams in theatres have often used empirical data to help them formulate strategies and policies. Their work is based on what cultural studies scholars like Hoggart, Hall or McRobbie call empirical cultural studies audience research (Hoggart 1957; Hall 1980; 1992; McRobbie 1997; 2005). This study recognises the achievements of this Cultural Studies tradition. However, a qualitatively approach is chosen here which addresses the importance of qualitative features of users’ roles and experiences.

This chapter makes explicit the necessity of a qualitative, multi-method approach to the study of Contact’s users. The deployment of the term ‘theatre user’ instead of audiences and participants illustrates the complexity of theatre terminology in the twenty first century. This has been indicated by Davis and Michelle:

Audience research is growing in scope and complexity with the expansion of audience roles from the traditional reader, listener, viewer, spectator, and citizen to the much more varied roles of user, customer, player,
producer, visitor, gifter, fan, friend, voyeur, learner, and participant. In apprehending this complexity, the field of audience research has become a confluence of disciplines and specialties within which a wide range of diverse and to some extent divergent methodological approaches can be identified. (Davis and Michelle 2011: 559-60)

The expansion of traditional audience roles points to the need for more differentiated terminology and new research methods. The focus on users as participants, communities, co-creators and co-constructors in this investigation has led to a patchwork of different theoretical approaches relevant to each of those ‘roles’. These roles are by no means comprehensive and more research is needed. The value of understanding users’ roles and experiences lies in the fact that it investigates participatory practices which audience and reception research have so far overlooked.

Through attempts to understand people who go through Contact’s doors it emerges, that, perhaps, they have to be accepted as a messy phenomenon. Researchers, recognising users’ different roles, may face issues which Law in his sociological case studies was forced to confront, too. I am going to use Law’s work to consider some of the limits of a study of theatre users. In essence, Law asks if researcher’s methods are able to deal with the core issue at stake or if they do they have to accept that some issues might be “vague and might only be known vaguely” (Law 2006:5). Theatre and performance scholars may have to be content with complex and heterogeneous representations of theatre users because they might, indeed, be a heterogeneous, incongruent and shape-shifting phenomenon. How can such a messy, heterogeneous and shape shifting phenomenon be described? Here, Law helpfully asks:
If this is an awful mess... then would something less messy make a mess of
describing it?  

(Law 2004:1)

In his quote Law is indicating that phenomena which are inherently ‘messy’ are
somehow ‘breaching’ formal research requirements. Research outcomes are
generally expected to be ‘singular,’ ‘clear,’ ‘stringent,’ and ‘compelling’. Research
methods have to deliver this clarity. It is widely assumed in the research
communities of science, technology and the social sciences that good
methodologies and methods (also referred to as ‘methodological hygiene’ by some)
lead to good research results. Poor research methods, therefore, lead to poor,
confusing and messy results.

This raises two questions: firstly, which assumption of the nature of reality
is underlying this research project and, secondly, what are the logic, the character
and the politics of the project of knowing (research). The latter asks what are the
assumptions underlying research. The former asks if reality is stringent, clear and
logical. Law argues that it is not. On the contrary, the world, in his view, is seen as an

unformed but generative flux of forces and relations that work to produce
particular realities.  

(Law 2006:7)

Law underlines here the idea that the world cannot be seen as a stable structure
and, therefore, cannot be simply mapped by the social sciences. Rather, he argues,
reality could be seen as a maelstrom

filled with current, eddies, flows, vortices, unpredictable changes, storms
and moments of lull and calm.  

(ibid.)

As many contemporary research methods cannot adequately deal with inherently
messy worldly phenomena some researchers assume that reality resists research
or ‘is wrong’ somehow. The reality is disturbing methodologies and methods. Unless, of course, it is assumed that our research methods are (not yet) fit to deal with the reality as it surrounds us on a daily basis because it is messy, confusing and, to only to a small part, knowable. It is necessary, to descend from abstract reason and to engage with our environment in an ‘ongoing and active interaction’.

The previous section dealt with the limits of traditional theatre terms and knowing in the theatre in more general terms. The discussion will now turn to the consideration of theatre users. The term is new in the field of audience and reception studies. This might mean that users cannot be easily mapped in consistent and coherent ways, not be easily pinned down and made to appear unambiguous and clear. On the one hand, it is generally assumed that it is the task of research to deliver neat and tidy descriptions. If, on the other hand, users are assumed to be ‘a messy’ phenomenon one could ask if it would be appropriate to search for ‘neat’ and tidy descriptions. The term ‘user’ allows for the inclusion of wider meanings and refrains from ascribing specific roles to specific groups of people. More importantly, it allows user to take on different roles. Rather than ascribing a specific role for specific groups of people, ‘users’ provides an umbrella term. Therefore, researchers need to find new approaches to deal with the ensuing messiness when users take up different roles. For this purpose it is important to employ multidisciplinary research tools. This is in accordance with Law who argues that it is the task of social sciences to:

begin to imagine what research methods might be if they were adapted to a world that included and knew itself as tide, flux, and general unpredictability.

(Law 2006:7)
1.5 Multi-method research

Only an omniscient deity would be capable of providing an exact account of crime, and in lieu of such an authoritative accounting it is probably most sensible to develop a crime index based on various admittedly faulty measures than to pretend that any single source of data provides a perfect image of reality. (Levine 1976:326)

Contact’s users are a complex phenomenon, about which we know very little. As Levine suggests, it is probably most sensible to use several methods to investigate it. The passage above suggests that no single method is capable of measuring complex phenomena fully. Contact’s users, it is suggested here, are such a complex phenomenon. They, therefore, need to be attacked, as Trow argues, with “the widest array of conceptual and methodological tools that we possess and they demand” (1957:35). Levine advocates here the use of multiple methods for the research of complex phenomena. Multiple measurements, he suggests, offer the chance to assess a phenomenon by looking at it from different viewpoints. Multi-method approaches combine methods from within either the qualitative or the quantitative research paradigm (Brewer and Hunter 1989). In contrast, mixed-method approaches blend qualitative and quantitative paradigms. A multi-method approach is used in this study to approach Contact’s users. The following qualitative methods are utilised: participant observation, interviews and questionnaires. Emerging qualitative methods like visual ethnography, creative workshops and Walking Fieldwork are also used.

It is necessary to use a mix of established and creative methods as the former contributes introspective and autobiographical perspectives to the search for users’ experiences. After all, interviews and other established research methods are one of the best available options to explore “complex and subtle phenomena
such as opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences” of Contact users (Denscombe 2010:173).

1.6 Participation

It has been shown that the term ‘audiences’ is contingent. The term ‘participation’ is historically determined, too. Participation in the theatre is currently mostly understood as participation which is “planned, intended, constructive, controlled, purposeful and integrated within the play.” (Way 1981: 3) The term is especially prevalent in the fields of Theatre in Education (TIE) and Theatre for Development (TfD). In this thesis, however, participation refers to practices which go beyond Theatre in Education and Theatre for Development.

The ‘classic paradigm’ reflects a clear distinction between mainstream repertory spectators and performers. However, as far as Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal’s research is concerned no such divisions are acknowledged, or, indeed, instituted in the celebratory forms of early Greek ‘dionysia’. These Greek festivals in honour of the god Dionysus could be seen as one of the earliest known forms of participatory theatre. For Boal, this is a time when the theatre was essentially non-institutionalised, or, when “free people [came together] singing in the open air” (Boal 1979: 119). It must be said, though, that ‘free people’ were a relatively small band of Greek citizens. Slaves, women, foreigners, and children were not ‘free’ in this sense. To be part of such a ‘theatrical event’ and to actively take part in it took very little. The transition between ‘spectators’ and ‘performers’ was fluid, and the distribution of was labour flexible. Instead of dividing between them, both were considered to be participants in the worship of Dionysus. The idea that both spectators and performers are playing their respective part in a
cultural practice which needs both is what some researchers today call a ‘theatrical event’ (Sauter 2000; Sauter 2002; Cremona, Eversmann et al. 2004). The relationship marked by inclusivity and openness could be argued to be one among many other necessary conditions for a theatrical event (in the sense of the Greek theatre) to occur. A strict division of labour, however, could be argued to be foreign to the celebratory nature of the worship of the Greek gods.

Concepts like ‘spectators’ and ‘performers’ became more materially established as stage and auditorium were formally separated by the construction of amphitheatres. Aristotle, importantly, formulated conditions for drama which have since been construed as having ‘value’. Aristotle’s taxonomy of tragedy and comedy influences theatre and performance practices to this day. Amphitheatres would, therefore, allow and give credence to the Aristotelian cultural practices, which conform to the paradigm which had produced them. Cultural practices codified by Aristotle are, to this day, widely regarded as art in their own right. In Davies’ sense this are works which contain a ‘special quality’. Other non-Aristotelian practices, however, are, at the same time, denied a similar status. The participatory practices in ancient Greek theatre could be counted among them.

Today, conforming (literary) traditions are often regarded as conforming to Aristotle’s criteria. Non-conforming (participatory) cultural practices, however, are rarely regarded as art forms proper.

However, non-Aristotelian arts and performing arts models were, in Aristotle’s time, also in existence. Both Aristotelian and non-Aristotelian practices are still in existence today. Performances accepting and working within Aristotelian ‘formulae’ contributed towards a devaluation of non-Aristotelian art forms. According to Aristotle, a division of labour was instituted thus: some participants
in the worship of Dionysus (the Dionysia) were conceptualised as ‘performing’ whereas a larger percentage of people became ‘onlookers’ and listeners to the performance. Thereby, a formal division between spectators and performers had been instituted. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the spectators in the Dionysia would, after performances, decide which play would win the Argon’s prize. They, too, were part of the theatrical event. Spectators had a vested interest in the performances as they were either performers or judges of the competition. Performers - choir members – and judges were called upon from the same pool of people (Green 2007; McDonald 2007; Wilson 2007).

In the twenty first century, similar divisions of labour seem to prevent increasing numbers of people from coming together to ‘freely sing’. The divisions of labour between spectators and performers are deeply embedded and continually re-inscribed in and by traditional theatre practices. Equally, those divisions of labour are also re-established in the thinking of theatre spectators/arts consumers and also those administering arts funding in the UK today. The dividing line between spectators and performers has become ‘taken-for-granted’. This line is so engrained, so deeply rooted, that the general public, audiences, and performers alike tend to think of it as ‘natural’ or ‘second nature’.

1.7 The ‘classic paradigm’

What is a ‘classic paradigm’? The ‘classic paradigm’ is mainly representing theatre performances in the classic literary tradition. The dominant theatre paradigm of

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7 Theatre patronage has in the course of the last 20 – 30 years at best levelled. The Arts Council England and its sister organisations in Wales and Scotland have intensified their efforts to increase participation in the arts in general and the performing arts especially. Pick, writing in 1985, argues that overall theatre attendance has been falling for at least three decades (Pick 1985:44).
the beginning of the twenty first century is based on a set of frames. The frames of
the 'classic paradigm' are a series of socio-cultural conventions governing the act
of theatre-going. Helbo defines 'theatre' as the basis for the 'classic paradigm' as
follows, it is

a specific sociocultural phenomenon involving physical enactment, normally of
pre-existing text, before a group of spectators. (Helbo 1991:vii)

Enactment, pre-existing text, and spectators can each be seen as a frame. However,
even in a broad understanding, there can be more performative frames involved:
firstly, the place where dramas are performed (mostly indoors); secondly,
spectators are normally paying a fee for their time in the performance space;
thirdly, people are gathering at a pre-determined time; and, fourthly, a clearly
demarcated audience area. This set of frames can be accompanied by any number
of additional ones: there can be pre-show, and also post-performance discussions;
there can be pre-, mid- and after show drinks; there can be dress codes; strict
codes of appreciation and many other variables. Frames can be framed again by
other frames; they can also be broken and questioned by the actions of spectators
as well as by performers. The 'classic paradigm' could also be seen to imply a
certain distribution of labour. Frames in the performing arts are often invisible, as
they soon become 'second nature' for those who attend theatrical events regularly.
Frames might, in fact, be most noticeable to those who are relatively new to the
behaviour patterns usually displayed at theatrical performances (compare, for
example Goffman 1975). For newcomers, frames can appear as what they are:
man-made and arbitrary sets of rules governing the attendance of an act of cultural
communication.
In *Philosophy of the Performing Arts*, Davies contends that the paradigm in the theatre is derived from music (Davies 2011). He defines a ‘classic paradigm’ by talking about “admirers, who know [the work well] yet, as lovers do, still find exquisite pleasure in the novel inflection of familiar routines” (Davies 2011:23). In other words, the ‘classic paradigm’ in the performing arts refers to three things: firstly, people who watch something they already know in order to appreciate it even more or to discover new aspects of it (Davies 2011:24). Secondly, the ‘classic paradigm’ refers to ‘a canon’ of works which are performed and, thirdly, to an organisation which produces canonical works for the appreciation of its admirers.

The affection admirers feel for the qualities of the art works brings them back into contact with the art works or performances in theatres time and again.

[T]he lover of a [...] work not only seeks out novel opportunities to experience it in performance. He or she also hopes that each performance will reveal new possibilities of the work, and assesses a performance on the basis relative to others he or she has attended. (Davies 2011:24)

As a philosopher, Davies questions the nature and the special quality of the art works. Is the special quality contained in the art work itself (in the performing arts the work refers to a play script) or in a combination of the quality of the play script itself and the performance of it? Or does the special quality exist outside of the play script itself, and only in the performance of it? Davies distinguishes between three types of performances: *performances of works, performances as works, and performances in works*. What distinguishes them is the way in which artistic value is realised. Davies firstly argues that the artistic value can already be present in the art work itself, as in a play of Shakespeare (*performances of works*). There can also be artistic value in the performance of an art work, which itself does not have
an artistic value in itself. Jazz music is one example for this (*performances as works*). Some late Modern and conceptual art works, Davies contends, seem ‘artistic’ without being artistic in the sense of *performance as works* or *performance of works*. They can neither be seen as “independent works that contribute to the appreciation and evaluation of those works” nor as works which need to be performed. Therefore, Davies argues, those works are seen as *performance in works*. It follows from the above that the artistic value of canonical plays is most often realised either through its intrinsic artistic value or through performance.

Most of Contact’s work does not satisfy the qualifications set out by Davies for the ‘classic paradigm’. Firstly, Contact’s users rarely ‘watch something they already know in order to appreciate it even more’. Secondly, Contact rarely performs canonical works. Thirdly, Contact is working to provide “life changing opportunities for creative leaders, artists and audiences” rather than bringing canonical works to appreciative admirers.⁸

Contact’s work blurs the boundaries between the ‘classic paradigm’ and other performing arts paradigms. It is extending Davies’ ‘classic paradigm’, in terms of spectators, canonical works, and the organisation, which brings audiences and canonical works together. Some of Contact’s cultural practices can be said to be on the fringes of, or outside, the ‘classic paradigm’. Others, however, lie comfortably within the ‘classic paradigm’. Contact offers a wide range of work. It produces and presents many alternative forms of theatre which do not comply with Davies’ ‘classic paradigm’. For example, it regularly puts on devised plays, experimental theatre, spoken word-slams, page-to-stage events, site-specific and

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⁸ See also Contact’s mission statement: [http://contactmcr.com/about/what-we-do/mission/](http://contactmcr.com/about/what-we-do/mission/) (last accessed: 02.08.2012).
promenade performances, Hip Hop Theatre, open dance events, or Playback
Theatre. However, Contact is, in the first instance, committed to young people and participation. This means that the productions of CYAC can be ‘alternative,’ ‘experimental’, or challenge conventions, or not, as the needs of young people demand. CYAC can, for example, produce mainstream theatre genres if that is considered helpful for the development of its young people. In 2010, Contact produced its first opera in collaboration with a community, 9 which was successfully repeated through an innovative roving performance during the Lost & Found Festival.10

The ‘classic paradigm’ can embrace different performance genres: classic Shakespeare, puppet theatre, musicals, and amateur dramatics performances. Those different types of theatre, however, largely adhere to the same ‘classic paradigm’: they bring admirers together with performances of scripted texts in a theatre. Most of these genres differ in terms of their content or their aesthetic form. However, they all adhere to a similar set of specific performative frames and socio-cultural conventions.

The ‘classic paradigm’ mainly represents theatre performances in the classic literary tradition. Performance art and happenings, however, differ from the literary tradition and the ‘classic paradigm’. They could be argued to be part of an alternative ‘performance paradigm’. The relationship between performers and spectators, and a focus on the body of the performer,11 are its main distinguishing

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11 For a discussion about the distinguishing features of Performance Art, please also refer to Fortier (Fortier 2002).
features in comparison with the ‘classic paradigm’. One can argue that the performance paradigm questions the traditional division of labour in the theatre.

There are some art forms which possess features of the classic and also the performance paradigm. Some improvisational forms of theatre (Commedia Dell Arte or Punch and Judy) and Theatre in Education (TIE) are some of the examples. Theatre in Education (TIE), for one, historically developed due to considerable frustration with established theatre practices in the 1960s. The outreach team at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, brought theatre and education together in a performance in pioneering ways (Jackson 2007). The art form today differs from its original, and changes in the way education is now funded have resulted in a severe reduction in the volume of participatory TIE. However, its primary aim to use theatre and drama to create a wide range of learning opportunities across the whole curriculum remains. Theatre in Education practices have overcome (literary) theatre’s formality, the perceived lack of relevance, and the division between performers and young spectators. This has led to an art form which is characterised by informality, relevance for, and involvement (at some level) of, young spectators. Most of its performances take place in settings and – until recently - were almost always devised. TIE companies often take a particular curriculum subject or topic and build a performance or workshop around it. Theatre in Education hardly ever brings ‘admirers together with performances of scripted text in a theatre’ (Davies 2011). However, it could be argued that Theatre in Education exists in a small niche which exclusively plays to young people in educational institutions and youth provision settings. It, therefore, could be argued to represent a special case alongside the ‘classic paradigm’ rather than it being a part of the performance paradigm. This art form fundamentally embraces
the division of labour practised in the ‘classic paradigm’ in spite of its insistence on ‘audience participation’ on some level. Theatre in Education’s audience participation can, according to Way, be characterised as:

planned, intended, constructive, controlled, purposeful and integrated within the play. (Way 1981: 3)

Audience participation within a play makes this art form emotionally engaging and effective. However, at the same time, it is also, to a degree, controlled by (theatre) professionals. This control, in the end, signifies congruence with the classic, rather than the performance paradigm. The choices of spectators are predetermined and somewhat limited. Such choices do not, for example, encourage school pupils to take up other roles within the theatre, for example that of a stage manager or director. This does argument not, however, detract from Theatre in Education’s efficacy. It merely points out that, as an art form, it has much more closer links with the classic, rather than alternative paradigms.

1.8 Literature Review

The following chapter section is going to highlight the relevant literature for this thesis. It has three parts: the first part makes it clear which literature is relevant for the argument and highlights my original contribution to existing debates. The second part is looking at audience and reception research in more general terms. The third part homes in on the future of audience research by considering what leading UK audience researchers – Press, Barker and Morley (Barker 2006; Morley 2006; Press 2006) – consider ‘unresolved questions’ of the field.

First, why do we need to look into the debates about the future of audience research? It is important to consider the future, as it highlights the values, strength
and areas of development of contemporary audience research. It also allows considering their relevance for the current study. Contact users have, in the beginning of this chapter, been pointed out as users of a participative theatre. Few audience researchers are, however, working with or towards exploring participative modes of using a theatre. Most base their work on the currently dominant distribution of labour in the theatre: audiences and performers. When Contact’s users take on more than one role or switch between roles, then they only become visible as ‘audiences’, ‘performers’ or ‘participants’ but not as playing other roles as well. Although the work of Press, Barker and Morley certainly covers the majority of audiences in the UK, it is unable to use its methods to cover all audiences in all theatres in the UK. The current study, therefore, makes a unique contribution to existing debates by concentrating on Contact’s users and their ground-breaking practices. Their practices have the potential to be models elsewhere - and some have started to be. For example, young people who participate in Contact’s ‘Future Fires’-programme act as mentors and consultants in a number of communities and realise art projects with them.

Members of both groups define audiences in a number of ways, and their research often focuses on specific groups of spectators. Bennett, for example, concentrates on alternative theatre audiences, Abercrombie & Longhurst on a sociological perspective on audiences, Sauter on the theatrical event, Reason on younger audiences,\textsuperscript{12} Hayes on theatre communities and McConachie on audience and cognition.

\textbf{Audience research and Reception Studies}

Audience Studies focuses largely on the social composition of spectators, including contextual factors, such as personal background, income, age, ethnicity, and expectations. Reception Studies largely concentrates on spectators’ receptive processes; it usually investigates how audiences make meaning of what they have come to watch at the theatre (Sauter 1997; Sauter 2002; Tulloch 2005; Reason 2006 (b); Reason 2008). However, recently, some audience researchers also ask which mental processes are involved when spectators experience (often text-based theatre) performances (McConachie 2002; McConachie and Hart 2006; McConachie 2008). Theatre marketers, as yet another set of players in the field of Reception Research, are most interested to know how theatre experiences influence future decisions of theatre going (Kolb 2005; Bernstein 2007; Jobst and Boerner 2011). Both forms of audience research, however, do not address participatory theatre users. This thesis, therefore, will argue that such users need to be the focus of a new branch of research.

\textsuperscript{12} In his work on dance audiences, however, Reason included people of all age groups.
Martin and Sauter (1995:26-34) explain the difference between more quantitatively-oriented audience research and qualitatively-oriented Reception Studies as follows:

Audience Researchers surveyed people coming to the theatres, but they never joined them in the auditorium in order to find out what they actually experienced during the theatrical event. This has become the business of reception research, which essentially deals with the spectator’s intellectual and emotional experiences in the theatre. (Martin and Sauter 1995:29)

Audience Research is mainly initiated by either theatres or corporations interested in theatre to justify the use of public money or for the development of public cultural policies. Audience Research is therefore mainly interested in:

the demographic features such as age, gender, occupation and education, cultural habits such as the frequency of theatre visits or other cultural activities; attitudes towards theatre, cinema, art, books, folk dance, choir singing, amateur painting, church going, sports and hiking tours and everything else that people might undertake during their free time: preferences as far as different theatrical genres are concerned, obstacles which prevent one from engaging in leisure time activities, be it fatigue, lack of money or lack of baby sitters – there are no limits to the inventiveness of the researcher when trying to establish a correct picture of the conditions under which a person attempts to attend a theatrical performance.

(Martin and Sauter 1995:28)

The authors argue that several surveys in Sweden in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s have shown that theatre-going was mainly a practice of the middle and upper classes. It also established that theatre-going is predominantly a social activity, which is hard to change from the outside (ibid.).
Reception Studies, therefore, largely focuses on the time in which audiences and performers are in co-presence of each other. Those periods of time are marked by specific expectations on both sides of the ‘footlights’. Reception Studies, it is argued here, are based on the ‘reception paradigm’. This paradigm relies on a relatively stable relationship and a specific distribution of labour between audiences and performers. In other words, theatre companies traditionally ‘cast’ their audiences in a specific role: that of an observer of actions on a stage. The theatre is interested in audiences coming back, taking up the same role, time and again. Leaving subsidies to one side, theatre, as a business model, depends on this specific distribution of labour: a relatively stable relationship between audiences and performers. It is not in theatres’ immediate interest to involve audiences, that is, its users, in theatre-making processes. The ‘classic paradigm’ leads theatres to have only a marginal interest in supporting audiences to develop participatory roles further, to become involved in theatre making processes, or to develop the ‘theatre ecology’ further by extending its practices. In this way, theatres need audiences in the role of ‘observers,’ as much as audiences need theatres as ‘creators’ of cultural offers. The currently dominant distribution of labour provides few incentives for traditional theatre audiences to explore the other side of the footlights.

This study, however, is looking at role and experiences of theatre users. It thereby challenges some of the concepts underpinning the ‘classic paradigm’ and works towards the theorisation of a, provisionally named, ‘participatory
The ‘participatory paradigm’ assumes that the fundamental relation between ‘users’ and the theatre is one of constant change. Both the Audience and the Reception Research models have difficulties dealing with spectators and performers when their roles differ from the ‘classic paradigm’. For example, both research traditions largely fail to address the ensuing ‘messy situations’ when theatre users’ roles are shifting or experiences differ from the ‘classic paradigm’. Those ‘messy situations’, in which it is difficult to exactly delineate theatre users’ roles, have been one of the foci of this research project. At least one tradition within audience and reception research works from a theoretically founded ‘ideal audience member’. However, in contemporary theatre practices, this ‘ideal’ model is often fragmented, reversed, and challenged. Moston-D.N.A., for example – which will be looked at in chapter four – challenges the distribution of labour between audiences and performers. Coney, among many other theatre companies, challenges the ‘classic paradigm’ in their work. IN 2011 they have facilitated CYAC to produce an interactive game called: Adventure Principle. Similar to companies like Forced Entertainment, they are “questioning, pushing, stretching and breaking theatre in many different ways to see what can be built from the wreckage” (Forced Entertainment). The question arises as to whether companies like Coney and Forced Entertainment still do ‘theatre’ or whether we need to find new concepts with which to refer to their work.

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13 The ‘participatory paradigm’ in theatres such as Contact or the Battersea Arts Centre, currently largely exists as a set of participatory practices. This work attempts theorising it.

14 Coney, are a theatre company which: “makes exciting stories through play, where the audience is catapulted into the leading role.” (http://youhavefoundconey.net/agency.html, accessed: 30.04.2012) Coney have just cooperated with CYAC in a production called The Adventure Principle.
The findings of this study have mostly been extrapolated from the activities of Contact users. Of extraordinary importance for this study are a small and very diverse group of people: Contact’s long-term users. It might, however, be possible to apply some findings to other venues with a participatory focus, which operate using similar principles, or where a similar multiplicity of user activities might be observed.\textsuperscript{15} As mentioned before, Contact’s long-term users are just one group among many other user communities.\textsuperscript{16} However, the importance of this group and the extraordinary work of Contact’s management and its board, to create, support, and sustain it, distinguish Contact from many other theatres in the UK. Contact’s long-term users are, for this reason, the centre of this study.

The current ‘state of play’ in audience and reception research shall now be considered through works of Press, Barker, and Morley. Andrea Press (2006) compares Morley’s Unanswered Questions in Audience Research (Morley 2006) and Martin Barker’s I have seen the future and it is not here yet ...; or, On being ambitious for audience research (Barker 2006) in the light of the debate about the “future of audience research” (Press 2006:93). Both Morley and Barker are important audience research scholars in the UK and beyond. Morley has actively contributed to Hall’s (1973) Encoding/Decoding-model, and Barker published influential studies on Judge Dredd (1998), Crash (2001) and the Lord of the Rings (2003-4). His ‘Viewing Strategy’, tested in the Lord of the Rings-research project, in his opinion, corrects and extends Hall’s Encoding/Decoding-model (Barker:123).

\textsuperscript{15} One of these other venues is the Battersea Arts Centre in London.

\textsuperscript{16} It is, according to Contact’s Head of Marketing (email 13.12.2011) impossible to quantify the number of Contact’s long-term users in relation to all other user groups or its audiences in the traditional sense. A conservative estimate might find that less than 10\% of the total number of Contact users can be viewed as long term users.
Press points out that both Barker and Morley share many concerns in regard to the future of audience research. Both feel, for example that debates about the priority of either qualitative over quantitative research or vice versa have outlived its usefulness in times of the advance of ‘new media’. Press even tentatively speaks about a ‘new age’ in audience research due to the rise of digital media. The reasons for the dissatisfaction of Barker and Morley with the field of audience research, however, are slightly different. Press notes that their “critiques are rooted in opposite methodological and epistemological positions on the overall purpose of research” (Press 1996:93). As an example, whereas Morley uses the term ‘active audiences’ as a recognition of the political dimension of research, Barker deconstructs this term as just not working and “a refusal of the still-recurrent notion of the “vulnerable audience” deriving from the mass communications/ behaviourist tradition” (Barker 2006:125). Equally, Barker rejects Hall’s Encoding/ Decoding-model. Morley is critical of its limitations, too, but calls for its continued use “because it has a lot to offer” (Morley 2006:111). Morley, for example, points to one weakness of the Encoding/ Decoding-model, which is its prioritisation of the cognitive and rational dimension of media consumption over the emotional and affective (2006:109). Not surprisingly, Barker agrees that audience’s responses are always emotionally charged understandings and educated emotions. That is to say, there is no way of separating out the cognitive and the emotional responses, regarding them as separately shaped or driven. (Barker 2006:126)

The emotional, non-rational responses seem to be a strong point of overlap which neither Barker nor Morley go deeper into. Barker is described as someone who
feels strongly that it must be the goal of audience research to “generate objective scientific propositions” (Press 2006:94). In his view, they must be produced by researching audiences empirically, instead of theorising about ‘ideal’ or abstract audiences. Morley, on the other hand, is more sanguine about this. He, however, feels that political dimensions of audience research need much more attention.

Press acknowledges her own background in Communication Studies. She also identifies Morley as one of the “progenitors of ethnographic audience research” (Press 2006:94). However, Barker mentions that he, too, is grounded in the Cultural Studies tradition of the ‘text’-audience relationship (Barker 2006:131). Press states that Barker is “dissatisfied with the lack of systematisation” in audience research (2006:95). He feels that it must be the goal of audience research to “generate objective scientific propositions” (ibid.). Morley, who shares this dissatisfaction is, on the other hand, satisfied that researchers are addressing “unanswered questions in audience research” (Press 2006:94). For him the “central problem with audience research in the current era is that we define the notion of its ‘political’ aspect much too narrowly” (ibid.). The role of the media in the construction of “cultural citizenship, a notion which conceptualises the political impact of mass media”, Morley argues, is often ignored by audience researchers. For Press, those opposing views of two leading figures in the field marks a tendency to bifurcate theory and research (2006:93) when talking about audiences.

Press readily points to a weakness in the field of audience research: “a frustrating lack of cohesion – at times even a sense of chaos – … at levels of theory, method and political motivation” (2006:95). Researchers from Ethnography, Anthropology, Sociology, and Communication Studies are involved and actively
engaged in trying to understand audiences’ practices. Looking at this situation quite generally, it seems understandable to note a lack of joined-up thinking. Phenomena as complex as, say, 'local' or 'global' audiences, call for joined-up thinking and challenge boundaries of traditional departmentalised knowledge in the academy. Different researchers tend to apply different agendas from different schools of thought to audience research. It therefore comes as no surprise that the state of audience research seems to 'lack cohesion' (Press 2006:95). Press comments twice on the lack of a 'common language' in the field (Press 2006:95). Audience research from this perspective is justified in calling for an interdisciplinary approach. It could also call for a discrete field, which, in its own right, would develop visions and a common language among researchers with different scientific backgrounds working on the same field. The development of a shared language, as propagated by Barker, Morley and Press, and also a shared understanding of common ground and vision appears to be a necessary step.

In her work, Press does not explore possible ways out of the present situation, but merely notes the "schizophrenic attitude the communications field exhibits towards ethnographic audience research" (2006:95). She notes that both Barker and Morley address and critically comment upon this situation. Press declares, that she, too, attempts to “forge a common language for them [Barker and Morley] and the field as a whole” (Press 2006:95).

Morley argues for the “return to key questions and issues set by that previous tradition, to rework them into something that is still new for their own times” (Morley 2006:114). Barker, on the other hand, argues for the negation of the old and for radical new beginnings. In my opinion, it is not a choice of Barker or Morley, developing or abandoning, but both are needed for the field to move
forward, developing, as long as they are useful, and starting afresh, when concepts have outlived their usefulness and new conditions force the emergence of new approaches. Both Barker and Morley have a point. It is the further development of multidisciplinary models which can secure the continued vitality and longevity of audience research.

This chapter has introduced the argument of the thesis – that Contact’s users do not fit the ‘classic paradigm’ and that new methods are needed to investigate them – and the methods for doing so. It has highlighted the literature which is relevant to this topic and has made clear how the research on users is different from researching audiences and why this is important. The following chapter is going to briefly trace Contact’s history. This provides the context for this study and establishes the links between Manchester, its educational institutions, and young people ‘doing theatre’. The next chapter will also show how Contact developed from a mainstream repertory theatre – with a youth theatre operating from a building ‘across the car park’ – into a young people’s theatre, which has participation at its very heart.

The last section in this chapter is now going to give a short chapter overview for the remainder of this thesis. This first chapter has introduced the argument and discussed some of the main concepts of this study. The second chapter is going to set up the context of the inquiry by introducing Contact in more detail. It will briefly introduce the history of the company as one of the few building-based young peoples’ theatres companies in the UK. This chapter will also present Contact’s Young Actors Company (CYAC) as one of the core parts of company. The third chapter will discuss the research methods used for the study. Its first section is going to introduce approaches from outside traditional audience
research and its second section establishes methods found in traditional audience research. The third chapter concludes the first part of this thesis. The second part of this study describes and explains new practices at Contact and explores new methods for researching them. Chapter four is looking at the roles of Contact users in two Contact projects, a CYAC production and an outreach project. The fifth chapter is honing in on Contact’s long-term users and their ‘Contact careers’ – the different roles they play at Contact over longer periods of time. The sixth chapter is discussing some innovative research methods in two case studies. It is addressing casual users’ experiences of a travelling theatre production at Contact and a site-specific CYAC production. The seventh chapter will use a mix of some established and some innovative methods to research Contact’s casual users. The eights chapter, the conclusion, will draw the main themes of the research together and look ahead to the future of audience research.
2 Chapter 2 - What is Contact?

This chapter is going to introduce Contact in some detail. It will, first, provide a short history of the building between 1966 and 1998 and, second, establish Contact Young Actors’ Company as a core part of this theatre. The roots of Contact go back much further than the establishment of the first University Drama department in this town. Manchester’s educational institutions have long been looking favourably upon young people who ‘put on entertainments’ for other young people in their spare time. Educational institutions have regarded role playing and observing performances as a playing a part in producing ‘rounded personalities.’ The underlying ideas have changed somewhat over time; the ways and means in which such opportunities are provided today have changed even more dramatically.

Figure 1 View from Contact onto Oxford Road; Photo by Fildes, courtesy of Contact, Manchester
The Manchester Young People’s Theatre or ‘Contact’ is a participatory theatre company in Manchester. It is a building-based young people’s theatre company located on Oxford Road, south of Manchester’s city centre between Moss Side and Hulme.

Contact is a theatre for young people and its wide range of users reflects Manchester’s urban multi-cultural mix. It is the only dedicated building-based organisation outside London committed to creating work for young adults. The atmosphere as well as the programming is developed with young people in mind, there are club nights, interactive public artwork, music making facilities and online access in the foyer.

The programming focuses on cutting-edge productions, both professional and in-house. Users of Contact have the opportunity to become involved in an extensive range of participatory and educational activities, which impact creatively on each other. No distinction is made between the value of professional productions, participative work and youth work.
Contact is also engaged in ongoing practical research around new forms of theatre—particularly through its *Mixed Movement: Digital Duets* and *Verbally Challenged: Digital Dialogues* programmes. Both experiment with ‘telepresence’ in which artists collaborate live between multiple cities through music, dance, spoken word and short plays. Work of this kind explores the future of live performance. The theatre space experienced by Contact’s users extends from the auditoria to the foyer and café, and is linked with other sites in Manchester and the UK (for example photographic exhibitions and touring productions) and even across the world, through *Contacting the World*, a unique festival which catalyses and showcases collaborative work between young people’s theatre companies from around the world (in 2010 UK, India, Indonesia, Iran, Denmark, Jamaica, The Netherlands, South Africa, Switzerland and USA).

Contact differs from mainstream repertory theatre companies. It rather resembles an alternative theatre venue. However, even such a term only touches the surface of what it is. For lack of a more fitting term Contact can be characterised as a ‘creative hub’ which works on local, national and international level. Its work has four overlapping strands: firstly, it brings performances of visiting companies to its stages; secondly, it operates a theatre for young people
called Contact Young Actor’s Company (CYAC) for 15 to 25 year olds and, thirdly, it runs outreach projects and organises cultural workshops for young people and local communities. Fourthly, and lastly, Contact runs a biennial international theatre festival called *Contacting the World.*

![Contacting the World Preview Night; Photo by Fildes, courtesy of Contact, Manchester](image)

*Figure 4 Contacting the World Preview Night; Photo by Fildes, courtesy of Contact, Manchester*

![Contacting the World 2012; Photo by Fildes, courtesy of Contact, Manchester](image)

*Figure 5 Contacting the World 2012; Photo by Fildes, courtesy of Contact, Manchester*

The main difference between Contact and other theatres lie in different business models based on contrasting theatre philosophies and distributions of labour. Contact understands young people as ‘users’, co-creators and collaborators. Young people's participation is indispensable for the vision, values and ambitions of this
theatre. ‘Users’ at Contact are those young people participating in theatre making; ‘end-users’, on the other hand, are those considered to ‘consume’ the end product, in this case theatrical performances. Contact wants young people to utilise its building, programmes and people as a resource for their development. Their relationship is intended to last for a long time. Long-term Contact users are encouraged to take on a variety of roles as: participants, apprentices, workshop leaders, employees, ambassadors and, finally, often as artists in their own right. The distribution of labour between Contact and its ‘users’ is dynamic. In contrast, mainstream repertory theatres rely on a fixed distribution of labour. Their business model is built on audiences as ‘end-users’ or consumers of pre-produced plays. Therefore, mainstream repertory theatres have little interest to encourage their audiences to take up different roles within the theatre. Audiences are ‘cast’ as ‘end-users’. In other words, mainstream repertory theatres need them to come back for the next performance and take up the same role.

Theatres’ different strategies for drawing in new spectators will make the difference between those distributions of labour clear. Mainstream repertory theatres are limited by their underlying distribution of labour when trying to attract audiences: they produce or programme theatre and want people to pay to see it. As the relationship with the ‘customers’ is rather fixed, their programming of performances is their main instrument to attract new audiences. Performances which are meant to attract new audiences will need to balance classic theatre conventions and innovation, content and developed forms, originality and established norms. Mainstream repertory theatres, in this sense, need audiences who possess a developed appreciation of their social and aesthetic strengths and weaknesses. In this way, such mainstream repertory theatres represent a
structure in which audiences confirm (and sometimes challenge) cultural tastes and opinions built on established cultural models. Contact, on the other hand, employs a flexible distribution of labour. It offers young people the opportunity to play several roles and have different experiences. It, therefore, draws in young people not only through its programming but also through workshops, events, outreach programmes, festivals, employment and training. As a participatory theatre it is less dependent on its casual users already possessing a developed cultural taste. In fact, young people's curiosity, non-conventionality and questioning of established (theatre) norms are one of the hallmarks of Contact and its productions.

It can be seen from the above that an investigation of the practices of Contact’s users is a task unlike traditional audience research in mainstream repertory theatres. Traditional reception research is often focussed on the investigation of mainly one aspect of one audience role, for example how do audiences make meaning from what they see? Contact’s users’ roles are, as we have seen, much more versatile. It is for this reason that different methods of research are used to investigate Contact’s users and their activities.

Alternative, oppositional and emerging performances can be said to be a regular part of Contact’s programme. The repertoire also includes ‘mainstream’ and other more traditional forms of theatre performances which meet its core values. Between 1999 and 2011, Contact developed an artistic programme which attracts regional, national and international followers.

It is challenging to define what Contact is; there isn’t a known concept which unites all aspects of its work. It is significant in this context that Contact has omitted the word ‘theatre’ from its trading name. Contact wants to avoid being
associated with ‘theatre,’ which is regarded by many as a highly formalised series of activities often appealing to a rather homogeneous group of people. 17 Contact has been called a ‘multi-art form venue’. This however, fails to set it apart from other such venues and does not address its participatory ethos. If one wants to get closer to the heart of what Contact is, one needs to describe what people at Contact do. Contact is a participatory theatre for young people. It also offers some features of an arts centre, a community centre, a gallery, an internet café, a music venue, a bar, a youth club, a recording studio and an open public space. All of those aspects and many more, form part of what Contact is. This multiplicity and its youth-based orientation make up a large part of its participatory ethos. Contact has, in fact, adopted two core principles: it is committed to the participation of young people and it continually asks through participatory practices of young people: ‘What is theatre?’

Contact’s official documentation defines its mission thus:

Contact is a dynamic charity based in Manchester with young people at the heart of everything we do.

We work locally, nationally, and internationally to provide life changing opportunities for the next generation of creative leaders, artists, and audiences.

We redefine theatre for the 21st Century, presenting and producing a diverse artistic programme in our building, surprising places, and virtual spaces. 18

Contact’s four core values are defined as follows in its current three year plan (2011-13): firstly, a young people centred approach to decision making; secondly, artistic excellence, integrity and creative risk taking; thirdly, respect for diversity

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17 See also Leach: “Research has shown that theatre audiences are surprisingly homogeneous in terms of their social status, income, education and occupations” (Leach 2008:170)

of cultures, creativity, and understanding within and between communities and the development of new artists and, fourthly, audiences and practitioners reaching under-served and excluded young people who may not have connected to theatre or the arts before. Contact’s four resulting core ambitions are defined as follows: firstly, *Globally Digital*; secondly, *Inspiring progress*; thirdly, *Manchester to the World* and, fourthly, *Vital to the Creative Economy*.

Among others, Contact runs the following schemes: Contact Young Actor’s Company (CYAC), Free Style Mondays, Re:Con (Young Marketing Team), Technique (Young Technicians Team), Monday Drop, Verbally Challenged, *Future Fires*, *Mixed Movement*, *Young Identity* and Artists in Residency-schemes. The latest addition to this broad portfolio is a programme called *Creative Experts*. Here, young people with expertise in the creative industries are “advocating on behalf of Contact […] in schools, businesses and with other organisation”.

**The Contact Building**

Contact’s building expresses the tensions between a modern theatre building and emerging, participatory practices. The building is built around a proscenium arch stage with raked-seating for around 300 audience members.

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20 Please refer to Appendix A.

21 Please refer to Appendix A.

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23 Please refer to Appendix A.

This stage was originally conceived as the centre piece of the University Theatre and designed keeping the needs of text-based (literary) performances in mind. The architectural principles underlying the stage and the auditorium influence the relationship between audiences and performers in performances on Contact’s main stage (Space 1). The setup of Contact’s main stage conforms to the ‘classic paradigm’. However, almost all of the other interior architectural design features challenge the ‘classic paradigm’ and support a different relationship between theatre users. Contact’s four ‘alternative stages’, its interior and its bar could in many respects be seen as belonging to an ‘alternative paradigm’ which aims “to address the ‘invisible barriers’ to entering a theatre building” (McGrath 2006:104). The company makes its building as open and accessible as possible. It “let[s] people wander into most areas of the building” (ibid.). The building is light-flooded and welcomes visitors with vibrant, primary colours. It has a bar, a lounge, several stages dotted around the building and several publicly accessible internet computers on the ground floor. Music is played everywhere in- and also outside its
doors. Contact is working hard to make all people feel welcome. By removing traditional “laws about seat numbers and what you can and can’t bring into the space” Contact is “breaking down barriers for young people [and] for a range of communities who felt unwelcome in stiff, traditional environments” (ibid.).

When new users arrive at Contact they generally think they have a clear idea of what they are likely to encounter. They expect formality and the exposure to a product of the art world (Davies 2011). New users’ general ideas about theatre - their horizon of expectations (Jauss 1982 (a):23)- are also likely to be shaped and influenced by a number of social and cultural factors: the widespread participation in school presentations at primary age and, the exposure to performed plays and devised performances in secondary schools. Additionally, there are several factors which contribute to a widespread knowledge about drama, theatre and performance among young people: first, the introduction to written play texts and the study of drama periods (Greek, Roman, Middle Ages, Renaissance, Modern, Postmodern, Asian) in secondary schools and Sixth Form colleges for students studying Drama, Theatre or Performance; secondly, the instruction about the historic functions of theatre; and, thirdly, the ubiquitous TV, cinema and online cultures among young people. New users’ ‘horizon of expectations’ towards Contact are assumed to fulfil functions similar to Jauss’ ‘horizon of expectations’ held by readers towards a text (Jauss 1982 (a)).

Many first-time Contact users are likely to arrive at Contact’s door step expecting to be exposed to a form of ‘theatre’ characterised by formality and by being a product of the art world. In fact, new Contact users become part of an informal atmosphere in the building and are likely to be exposed to other, different forms of ‘theatre’ characterised by informality, different art processes (and
products) and also different relations between producers and users. Contact practises theatre in a very different way compared to the literary theatre tradition of the ‘classic paradigm’. Instead of continuing to produce classic plays from a literary canon Contact defines its practice through participation and the search for productive relationships between its users and also between users and the wider world. Contact is interested in developing dynamic participative practices and also supports its long-term users. In 2009, for example, Contact’s head of marketing and communication, Claire Will, wrote a communication strategy for the organisation. This document listed the groups that Contact wanted to communicate to and win over as new users. In 2011, after only two years, a new communication strategy was needed as some of Contact’s priorities had changed and new cultural practices were implemented. The first document stated that Contact wants to communicate with four groups which in 2009, only two year previously, had been outside its remit: firstly, users of its newly established Media Lounge (music production); secondly, artists and young people interested in new digital media technologies (including telepresence), thirdly, artists wanting to use their talents entrepreneurially and, fourthly, pupils coming to Contact with their schools.25

2.1 A short introduction to Contact’s history, 1966-1998

The history of Contact can only be briefly outlined here. On the one hand, much more would need to be said about this regional theatre in the North of England. On

25 School groups had, incidentally, played an important role at Contact Theatre’s between 1973 and 1998.
the other hand, like so many other regional theatres in the UK, Contact’s story is waiting to be written.26

Contact has a long history of focussing on young people and public engagement. It builds on a tradition of ‘entertainment’ aimed at young people in Manchester. Such ‘entertainments’ for young people, often also produced by young people, have in the past been staged by students of Manchester's educational institutions. These cultural activities have been put on long before the advent of youth theatres or drama departments in the region. Looking back, however, it becomes apparent that young people and their ‘needs’ have been conceptualised differently over time. Different conceptualisations led to theatres catering for young people in different ways. Repertory theatres have come to be seen as adequate in providing for young people. Most often, producers, directors and actors presented young people with what they – the adults – conceived of as having value for young people. Young people’s participation and involvement in determining what they wanted to see or how they wished to be involved was seen as optional. Young people, thereby, mostly functioned as the recipients of a well-intended theatrical fare. At Contact today, young people are seen as participants, members of communities and co-creators. Contact is a company which, through its participatory work, has been particularly successful in productively engaging a wide variety of young people through theatrical means.

The building which accommodates Contact today housed several theatre companies before. In its first stage, between 1965 and 1972, it was called the

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26 Rowell and Jackson’s The Repertory Movement: A History of Regional Theatre in Britain (1984) is one of the few sustained accounts dealing with regional theatre in Britain. It provides case studies of six repertory theatres: The Nottingham Playhouse, The Citizen’s Theatre (Glasgow), The Salisbury Playhouse, The Victoria Theatre (Stoke-on-Trent), The Merseyside Everyman Theatre (Liverpool) and the Royal Exchange Theatre (Manchester).
Manchester University Theatre. In its second stage, after the ‘69’ Theatre Company took over, it was called: ‘69’ Theatre Company at the Manchester University Theatre. With the establishment of Contact Theatre Company in the mid-seventies it became, thirdly, known as Contact Theatre at the Manchester University Theatre. It was, fourthly, named Contact Theatre in the mid-seventies and operated under this name until 1997. Fifthly and finally, from 1999 onwards it has been known as Contact.

Like many creative enterprises, Contact has deep and complex roots in the past. The theatre is physically surrounded by University of Manchester buildings. It also shares a number of personal and institutional links with this institution. The earliest forerunners of this regional theatre are in ‘entertainments’ arranged by students’ drama societies at Owens College, Victoria University and The Mechanics’ Institute. It was seen as important that there should be theatre provision for young people. It was also believed that theatrical performances could link local communities with the student population. Pullan (2007:171) argues that students performing for other students and for local communities was almost seen as a way of compensating or ‘giving back’ as privileged students and the space-hungry university tended to pushed out deprived communities. Performing in plays and going to see ‘entertainments’ was additionally seen as a way to “generate well-rounded graduates, both socially and academically” (Pullan and Pullan 2007:171). Students performed in a variety of venues: the Round House in Ancoats; the Students’ Unions of the University of Manchester and UMIST (the University of Manchester Institute for Science and Technology); the Renold Theatre; the Sir Arthur Worthington Hall and several smaller, unnamed spaces.

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27 See also Rowell & Jackson: 202.
In 1965 Dame Sibyl Thorndike opened the Manchester University Theatre (Pullan and Pullan 2007:172). The building consisted of an adaptable, raked auditorium (this was welcomed and anticipated by many students at the time) which could seat 250 to 350 people, a foyer and a café. Professor Hugh Hunt, the head of the newly established drama department, was its first director. The theatre served the University of Manchester’s Language and Drama departments, several university drama groups and visiting theatre companies. Most importantly, however, and revolutionary for the time, the Manchester University Theatre was intended to be run by a resident professional company. From the late sixties to the early seventies the Manchester University Theatre was run as a repertory theatre by the ‘69’ Theatre Company and traded under the name ‘69’ Theatre company at the Manchester University Theatre. It ‘delivered a mixed programme of music, drama, dance and comedy to its target youth audience’ (Pullan and Pullan 2007:172). The ‘69’ Theatre Company moved on to take over what is known today as Manchester’s Royal Exchange Theatre. In 1972, Hugh Hunt, together with Barry Sheppard and others, founded Contact Theatre Company, which became the Manchester University Theatre’s resident company in 1973. For some years it traded under the name of Contact Theatre at the University Theatre. According to Pullan, Hugh Hunt was conscious of the importance of participation and the relationship of the company with local communities surrounding it. He, therefore, “sought to engage young people from the local area in participating in performing arts” (ibid.). Contact Theatre continued to focus its (mostly literary-based) output on young people. Rowell and  

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28 Hartnoll (1983:521)

29 That a resident professional theatre company is running a building-based campus theatre is rare in the UK to this very day.
Jackson additionally highlight, that it was one of a few theatre companies in the UK who sought to engage young people from a theatrical base:

The Young Vic in London [...] and Contact Theatre in Manchester (from 1973) are two examples of repertory theatre companies formed specifically to work for young people and operating in and from buildings rather than touring.

(Rowell and Jackson 1984:95)

The repertory company continued to run a mixed program for approximately eight or nine months each year. In the remaining months several university departments and drama societies utilised its stage. Eventually, the company dropped the “Manchester University Theatre” from its name and called itself Contact Theatre.30 By this time Contact Theatre was funded by the University of Manchester, Manchester City Council, the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) and the Arts Council England.

In the view of a regular user at the time,31 Contact Theatre was presenting (mostly) written drama in ways which was thought to attract and educate young people. Contact Theatre had an emphasis on New Writing and successfully engaged playwrights to write plays for younger audiences. Willie Russell and Alan Bleasdale were writers in residence at Contact Theatre before they became nationally known. Contact Theatre’s Christmas pantomime became successful within Greater Manchester; it would usually run for two to three months to full houses. Hartnoll remarks about its further programme of work: “The theatre also visits school and youth clubs, and runs educational drama workshops” (1983:521).

30 In 1972 the Manchester Young People’s Theatre (now Contact) was founded by Barry Sheppard and Hugh Hunt.

31 Personal email communication with Giles Haworth, 15.09.2011 (Haworth 2011).
Organisationally, Contact Theatre and its youth theatre were two parallel companies. This separation represented a fundamental split between the theatre and its youth arm; which was only overcome in 1999. Both organisations existed independently of each other under the umbrella of Contact Theatre. A small and dedicated youth theatre venue, the Brickhouse was part of the organisation. Importantly, the Brickhouse was physically separated from the main building. This 'separateness' manifested the split between the main theatre and its youth theatre. Generally speaking, in the Brickhouse groups of young people were guided by a youth theatre leader in producing mostly text-based (literary) plays for other young audiences. The youth theatre was able to show its yearly production on Contact’s main stage. The activities of both organisations remained, otherwise, separate. The division of Contact Theatre and its youth theatre was also visible in the positions of their leaders in the organisation. The director of the youth theatre was responsible for all matters concerning the youth theatre and reported to Contact Theatre’s board. Contact Theatre’s artistic and executive directors, on the other hand, oversaw the operation of the main theatre, touring and all in-house productions.

In the late 1990s Contact Theatre was undergoing a process of change. There were four main areas of concern: firstly, its programming attracted a relatively small section of the population; secondly, too few young people frequented the building on their own accord, thirdly, the building was in need of a refurbishment and, fourthly, the ethnic mix of Manchester’s population lacked representation among its audiences and staff.

Each point will now shortly be considered. Firstly, Contact Theatre’s programming mainly attracted a small and dedicated circle of people which were,
generally speaking, white, middle class and mature. In Davies terms, audiences could be seen as 'admirers' who came to performances programmed by the company to appreciate a certain theatrical diet (Davies 2011:23). Contact Theatre’s audiences were mainly traditional theatre audiences. They had few opportunities of trying out other roles and many of them might had not have been willing to participate in any other way. Secondly, it was problematic for the company that very few young people visited the theatre’s performances on of their own initiative. If young people came to the theatre they frequented evening performances either as part of school parties (to see the performances of prescribed school texts) or to take part in 'theatre days'. Those open days consisted of theatre tours involving dramatic or thematic explorations. By extension Contact Theatre came to be associated with 'school' activities and was, therefore, unlikely to be utilised by young people in their spare time. Thirdly, after thirty years of use the building was in need of repair. Contact Theatre could, fourthly and lastly, be seen to struggle to successfully engage through its programming with Manchester’s multi-cultural and multi-ethnic population. Contact Theatre's programming also did little to attract communities from its

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32 See also Leach (2008:170). Further, Contact’s audiences could be seen to be white, middle class and middle aged due to at least two reasons. The first is in its history as university- and campus based theatre. The second reason is in the theatre’s consistent repertoire of traditional English (or European) texts. The plays of Shakespeare and Brecht have been featuring highly in school curricular for many years and were, therefore, more often produced. This, too, contributed to a largely ‘Eurocentric’ programming, which, in turn, attracted certain parts of the populace more than others. Contact Theatre also staged several non-European plays over the years (A Raisin in the Sun, Meridian). However, the communities of Moss Side and Hulme could rightfully claim that they did not see their own lives and experiences reflected in Contact Theatre’s repertoire. Rowell and Jackson (1984:172) mention that an audience survey in 1981 found that the proportion of 18-24 year olds among its overall audiences made up 41% at Contact compared with 37% the Library Theatre and 28% at the Royal Exchange.

33 A thematic exploration could deal with a wide variety of topics, for example, the short novels of Steinbeck or First World War poetry.
neighbouring areas.\textsuperscript{34} Its audiences, performers and staff represented a relatively small and homogenous section of Manchester’s communities. Wyllie Longmore, a black actor, director and board member (who went on to become Chair of Contact’s board), reflected on this situation:

When I looked outside onto the streets [of Manchester] I could see black people. Wherever they were, they were not in here; neither as staff nor as audiences.  

(WL 2011)

In short, in the mid-nineties, Contact Theatre was in danger of losing its identity. It needed to attract more diverse audiences; motivate many more young people to visit the theatre on their own accord; find investment for its building and respond to a changing demographic structure of its region. The company was also in need of offices, rehearsal rooms and dedicated workshop space.

A short outline of the developments between 1995 and 1997 will be presented now. Those developments led to the discontinuation of Contact Theatre (the repertory theatre company) and to the establishment of Contact (the participatory theatre company). In 1995 Contact Theatre prepared a Lottery bid for a substantial improvement of its building. In doing so it also sought to address the other main areas of concern mentioned above. It won the Lottery bid which allowed for the inclusion of a large rehearsal room, a small studio space,\textsuperscript{35} increased office space, increased foyer space with the provision of a bar and refreshment areas on the ground and first floor, improved backstage areas and a re-modelled auditorium and workshop. In 1996-7 work began on the new

\textsuperscript{34} Contact could be argued to have been successful in reaching the wider communities of Moss Side and Hulme in their school and community work. However, people from those areas rarely came to see work on the main stage in big numbers.

\textsuperscript{35} The studio was originally intended to house the youth activities Contact.
building. Initially, while the building was closed, the company presented its work in other venues around Manchester. The education and the community departments continued to work out of the Brickhouse. From this youth theatre venue outreach and schools projects were run. Contact Theatres’ inexperience in touring its own productions, however, made this work uneconomic and touring ceased. A fire broke out when the building work was at an advanced stage. It destroyed large parts of the refurbished building. This forced Contact Theatre to stay ‘dark’ for much longer than anticipated.

The fire represents a turning point in the history of the company. Up until this point the board and the management intended to continue to run Contact as a repertory theatre after the refurbishment. It was planned to make the shell of the company ‘bigger and better’ and tweak some aspects of its operation to attract more diverse, youthful audiences. The fire, however, afforded the board with a chance to pause and re-think its strategy. Contact Theatre’s board used the closure of its theatre to radically question its operation on all levels and to rethink the company’s mission and rationale. It considered its four main issues, mentioned above, in the light of the demands of a much bigger building. In considering its options it became increasingly clear that the heart of the organisation, its theatre and business models, needed to change. However, what exactly needed to change so that the company would thrive and become distinguishable among Manchester’s theatres? According the Longmore, one of the most important clues in this search came from the name of the organisation: the Manchester Young

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36 Some work was shown in Manchester’s Dancehouse, on Oxford Road.

37 ‘Staying dark’ is a theatre expression for a closed, in-operational theatre. The theatre in this way is only open when the lights are on.
People’s Theatre. The new board interpreted this name as their programme: they saw it as imperative to transform their theatre into a place in which young people want to be in and bring their unique energy to. They envisaged that the ‘new Contact Theatre’ needed to become a youthful place in which young people’s concerns and interests were central to the operation of the company. In previous years this had not always been the case. However, in addition to the internal came external issues. The modus operandi of Contact Theatre had become worn and was almost indistinguishable from other theatres in Manchester. The Royal Exchange and the Library Theatre, for example, also aimed to attract young people. Both offered Christmas pantomimes, performed modern playwrights like Brecht and Beckett and engaged in ‘new writing’. Both also ran their own youth theatres.

On reflection it became apparent that the repertory model was unlikely to enliven and sustain an enlarged theatre building. The board realised that Contact needed to re-establish itself and strive for a unique position within Manchester’s theatre landscape in order to secure a future for the organisation. It had to match the scale of the new building with an equally ambitious and exciting concept.

The combination of economic and cultural factors indicated above influenced the board’s decision to adopt a radically new – participatory - theatre model and build a business model around it. This change was set in motion when the board began to adopt participatory working principles. Firstly, the board realised that young people needed to move from the periphery (youth theatre) in the Brickhouse to the heart of the organisation. Young people must occupy the centre of the organisation – “everything else starts from there” (WL 2011). Contact Theatre’s organisational structure, its policies, its way of operation and its artistic

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38 Interview with Wyllie Longmore, 02.03.2011.
policies and output needed to take young people as their starting point. It was imperative that the companies’ work reflected young people’s concerns as directly as possible. Secondly, the board found that the traditional divide between Contact Theatre and its youth theatre needed to be replaced by an inclusive model. The new building, therefore, needed to bring the main house operations and the youth theatre physically together under one roof. Thirdly, instead of reproducing a repertory theatre model, the new Contact Theatre aimed to be a place of youthful development, discovery and experimentation. The question ‘What is theatre?’ is, therefore, at the heart of all of its operations.

The following working principles emerged during the interim period between the closure of Contact Theatre and the opening of Contact. They be described thus: firstly, young people are at the heart of the organisation; secondly, participation is the basic work principle and thirdly, the quest for ‘what theatre is’ is guiding all activities of the company.

Once the board had established this vision it employed three key people to translate it into reality. Kully Thiarai and Fiona Gasper were appointed as interim
executive artistic director and executive producer to develop the business plan and to devise an administrative structure. After an interim period John McGrath joined the team as new artistic director. Together those three key players built up Contact’s foundations as participative young people’s theatre. Together they embarked on a journey which aimed at transforming Contact Theatre into Contact. Their aim was to build Contact around the strengths, interests and concerns of young people. They envisioned a theatre heaving with energy and with youthful excitement. It is a theatre which works to provide opportunities for young people to explore and develop as artists. In doing so, Contact’s prioritised young people’s interest over traditional models of theatre-making. This participatory theatre is built around young people, energy, excitement, discovery, ideas, experimentation and more than anything the development of tomorrows’ casual and long-term users. Contact has since aimed at creating theatre with an “extraordinary sense of occasion, intimacy and expectation” (Rowell and Jackson 1984:172).

Contact has set up several structures which differ from mainstream repertory theatres. These new structures often built on and extend ideas and practices which have questioned traditional theatre practices. Theatre in Education is just one of Contact’s many forerunners. Theatre in Education, for example, introduced performances centred around themes which were taken directly from the lives of young people and TIE companies brought theatre to places outside of theatre buildings. One of these new structures is Contact Young Actor’s Company.
2.2 Contact Young Actor’s Company (CYAC)

![Image of a performer]

Figure 7 Contacting the World 2012: CYAC and Arts-in-Action Wordsmiths (Trinidad); Photo by Fildes, courtesy of Contact, Manchester

The Contact Young Actors Company is:

a company where young actors and artists can grow and explore the different styles and practices. [It is] one of the most diverse and forward facing groups of young actors and artists [young people] are likely to come across.40

CYAC is integral to the operation of Contact and is run by the Creative Development department. Through its work Contact connects with a wide variety of young people and many different ethnic communities. A project manager in collaboration with the head of the department and one other creative staff member are responsible for the choice of lead artists, former CYAC members and director/facilitators for every performance. In coordination with the artistic director of Contact they determine whose working methods, philosophies and artistic expression they want to expose young people to.

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40 Contact website, last accessed: 02.05.2012.
CYAC is a programme which has, for several years, been operating in trimesters. Young people can audition three times a year. Each member is allowed to stay for a year or three periods. This means that after each audition around one third of the company, those who have completed three terms, will depart from the company. In their stead those young people join who have auditioned successfully. CYAC routinely puts on three performances a year, in spring, summer and at Christmas. Each production is prepared by an eight week period led by an external artist, who is assisted by a former CYAC member. This young person will later on accompany the rehearsal process as assistant director to the director of the performance. As such this experienced young individual is the link between CYAC, the lead artist and the director and their two separate but joined work periods. The director/facilitator of the performance will start to facilitate the group of young people three weeks before the performance is due to open. The director/facilitator will collaborate with his artistic team, assistant director, the Creative Development department and the technical team to assure that the theatrical event will take place. CYAC has worked, among others, with the following directors/facilitators: Grupo XIX de Teatro, a Brazilian site-specific performance company; Aqueous Humour, a clowning company; and with Working Girls, a Manchester-based theatre company.

Next to all its strengths Contact has, of course, some weak points, too. One weakness is that the transition to the outside world is left to the young people individually. There is, currently, no strand within its work which helps young

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41 The author began his observations of Contact in October 2009. From that time CYAC’s way of working has been remained unchanged.

42 The artist who has led the preparations so far will step back at this point.
artists to take the next step and find employment or involvement in projects outside of Contact. Since the organisation encourages young people to develop strong links and relationships, some young people say, that they find it difficult to leave and work elsewhere. There is a tendency that some of those who feel part of the ‘family’ would like to stay there ‘forever’. The closeness of Contact’s community or ‘family’ can prove, for some, to be disadvantageous, too. There is also a trend that some young people ‘over-identify’ and get attached to staff or to a particular interpretation of doing theatre. Contact’s way of working becomes, for some young people at least, close to a ‘dogma’ or a preferred style which they wish to stay ‘true’ to. In mainstream repertory theatres, however, a focus on participation, experimentation and questioning the art form is rarely appreciated. This leaves young people with a choice of either: working with other Contact-people, producing solo-work or developing skills which are required at other theatres. The creative freedom which young people enjoyed at Contact, in some cases, becomes a drawback in a theatre ecology which is largely oriented towards the continuation of the ‘classic paradigm’. The skills of ‘Contact’s participatory practitioners’ are appreciated in some circles. In the world of mainstream repertory theatre, however, those skills are rarely seen as an ‘entry ticket’, they carry little prestige and are, therefore, rarely well paid. However, it does not prevent Contact’s young artists from using their skills in a great variety of contexts in the cultural industries and beyond. Such loyalty to one style is similar to going to a youth theatre to learn a ‘craft’, where a youth theatre leader shows young people ‘how it is done’. In this way young people learn how to repeat traditional ways of ‘doing theatre’ rather than developing creative ways of doing theatre.
This chapter has provided a frame of reference for the current study by looking at Contact, its history and at one of its core constituents: Contact’s Young People’s Theatre. The next chapter – the last of the first part – will discuss the methods of research used in this study. It will look at established methods – such as questionnaires and participant observation – and also at some creative methods, for example, creative workshops, visual research and Walking Fieldwork.

3 Chapter 3 - Methods of Research

In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground where practitioners can make effective use of research-based theory and technique, and there is a swampy lowland where situations are confusing “messes” incapable of technical solution... in the swamp are the problems of greatest human concern. (Schön 1983:42)

[It is necessary that ... we descend from the imaginary heights of abstract reason and resituate ourselves in an active and ongoing interaction with our environment. (Ingold 2000:16)

The previous chapter has provided an insight into the aims, development, and organisation of Contact. It emphasised the differences between Contact and mainstream repertory theatres. It stressed Contact’s three basic working principles: young people are at the heart of the organisation; participation is the main method of engagement; and the question, ‘what is theatre’, guides all activities of the company. Contact’s participatory principles, therefore, form the backdrop for the current chapter and the argument of this thesis.

The following chapter is divided into five parts. The first part will discuss how Contact’s users challenge the existing audience research paradigm. The second part addresses the multi-method approach used in this study. The third part moves on to discuss approaches originating outside of traditional audience
research. The fourth examines traditional audience and reception research methods. The fifth and last part of this chapter details how my own approach evolved.

This research project intersects the fields of Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies and Cultural Studies and is based in the qualitative tradition of enquiry. This chapter explains the work's location as rooted in the Cultural Studies audience research tradition. At the same time, however, it is branching out into new areas. Performance Studies’ questioning of the relationship between spectators and performers has provided an important impetus for this work. Its questions made it possible to explore the users’ roles and experiences, where, in the past, there had mainly been either the qualitative investigation of aesthetic experience or the quantitative inquiry of spectators’ social characteristics. The exploration of Contact’s users’ roles and experiences are inviting alternative methods of investigation. My background as artist, teacher and researcher, have also influenced the inquiry.

This thesis is based on research material collected between 2009 and 2011 at Contact in Manchester. This includes participant observation of two CYAC productions and an outreach project, in-depth interviews with Contact’s long-term users, a focus group, creative workshops with College students, video interviews with Contact’s casual users and a longitudinal study.

3.1 Approaches from outside traditional audience research

Artistic research can never be characterised by a well-defined, rigid methodology. Rather, its form of research could be described as methodical: it entails a strong belief in a methodologically articulable result

- 86 -
founded by operational strategies that cannot be legitimized beforehand.

(Slager 2009:55)

The following section will discuss the methods used here which originated outside traditional audience and reception research. This study utilised a case study approach as its overarching principle. Within each case study different methods were used such as participant observation, creative workshops, Walking Fieldwork and a longitudinal study. Some of those research methods, for example, participant observation, Walking Fieldwork and the longitudinal study have been adapted from the social sciences. The creative workshop method has been modified from reception research.

This research project poses a challenge: it balances humanist and artistic understandings of research. Whereas this study is clearly not an artistic practice-as research project, it shares a number of concerns with art-based, creative research. At the same time, this study embraces some of the challenges to established academic knowledge such as that formulated by Slager:

The curricula of many institutions for art education are largely dominated by an art historical model. As a consequence, one gratuitously deploys a clear-cut duality: on the one hand, artists produce artistic work, while on the other hand, professionals [such as critics] supply the frameworks for the interpretation of those works. Standard works such as Ernst Gombrich’s *Art and Illusion* and Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* have provided a methodological foundation for a nearly dogmatic art historical hermeneutics. (2009:49)

Dualistic thinking clearly does not lend itself to users playing different roles at Contact. Attendees of a theatre who do more than witness a performance challenge traditional distinctions between audiences and theatre makers. Especially Contact’s long-term users can, for example, be workshop leaders,
theatre makers and artists. At other times, they can act as workshop assistants, ambassadors, technicians or hosts. In finding itself 'in between established academic fields', this study acknowledges that research and the creation of knowledge are in themselves historically determined. Early practical research in medicine and physics borrowed and transformed 'scientific methods' from the world of letters, as currently art and design subjects adapt methods and methodologies to their fields of interest (Jones 2009:36).

3.1.1 Participant Observation

Why is participant observation used in this study? Participant observation is used here because it is one means to unveil first-hand the differences between the practices of Contact’s users and traditional mainstream repertory audiences. Jorgensen (1989) describes participant observation as a method which:

- seeks to uncover, make accessible, and reveal the meanings of (realities) people use to make sense of their daily lives. In placing the meaning of everyday life first, the methodology of participant observation differs from approaches that begin with concepts... (Jorgensen 1989: 15)

Participant observation is a way of finding out through direct observation what drives the behaviour of people and groups. It is a way to seek an understanding of the dynamics between people, places and organisations. Jorgensen (1989:13-4) has defined seven basic features of participants observation: the insider's viewpoint; the world of everyday life; interpretative theory and theorising; an open ended logic and process of enquiry; in-depth case studies; the participant role and methods for collecting information.
3.1.2 Walking Fieldwork

What is Walking Fieldwork, why was it used and what are its strengths and limits? Walking Fieldwork is a performative technique whereby two people accompany each other as they narrate their emergent thoughts and experiences in real time (Irving 2010:3). The idea of Walking Fieldwork - the combination of walking, performance and photography – has deep roots in the past. Picasso’s walking tour of Paris in 1916 was photographed by Jean Cocteau. Rouch and Morin’s film Chronicle of a Summer (1960) used Picasso’s journey and the new technology of synchronous sound for combining film, walking and narration.

For Irving

Fieldwork — like art and colour — is also something made: a practice of the body involving imaginative reconstruction and sensory-aesthetic activity that takes the form of a daily “testing out” of new surroundings, ideas, and misunderstandings within the sphere of other people’s social lives.

(Irving 2009-4)

Walking Fieldwork pushes the boundaries of what is conventionally understood as audience research and questions its limitations. Walking Fieldwork is an embodied research method. It exposes research participants to physical aspects which trigger memories. This is achieved by allowing contributors to walk to the places they want to talk about. The physical movement of the participant combined with the stimulation of the environment through the five senses create a rich experience.

Walking Fieldwork brings up a wide variety of ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz 1973 (b)) about the relationship between casual users, performers and the performance. Casual users expose how they experienced performances and how
their responses developed during and after Walking Fieldwork. In this way some light is shed on the way how experiences shaped the performance and also the theatrical event.

3.1.3 Visual Methods

“Visual methods is one of the fastest growing and most dynamic and contested of fields.” This is how Pauwels and Margolis introduce their one-volume handbook for visual research methods (2011). They argue that visual methods have become much more widely accepted since the potential of images began to be recognised among word and number-based researchers (see also: Prosser 1998). The academic literature on visual methods generally distinguishes three different kinds of visual material: firstly, found images (historical artefacts, advertisements), secondly, researcher-produced images (still photography) and, thirdly, video material (Banks 2001; Knowles and Sweetman 2004; Pink, Alfonso et al. 2004; Pink 2007; Stanczak 2007).

What are the strengths and limits of visual methods and why are they used here? The current study employs researcher-produced images and video because they make a valuable contribution to the investigation of Contact users’ roles and experiences in at least three ways. Firstly, visual methods aid memory, secondly, they enhance reflexivity, and thirdly, visual methods allow the investigation of the ‘visible’, ‘invisible’ and the ‘accidental’ - what is in the photographic frame, what is in the frame but could not be seen at the time and what was shot but had not intended to be in the frame. Visual images speak as much about ‘absences’ as well as ‘presences’. Visual images also have the potential to address some of the blind spots and biases of this thesis and are a valuable part of the multiple-method research strategy.
Banks and Morphy argue that “visual recording methods have properties such that they are able to record more information than memory alone, or notebook and pencil, and that certain of them are indexically related to the reality they encode” (Banks and Morphy 1997: 14). Prosser suggests four main advantages of image-based research: images can show characteristic attributes of people, objects and events; through our use of photographs we can discover and demonstrate relationships that may be subtle or may be overlooked; photographs can communicate feelings or suggest the emotion imparted by activities, environments and interactions; and photography can provide a degree of tangible detail, a sense of being there and a way of knowing that may not readily translate into other symbolic modes of communication (1998:116). Pink adds to this by saying that photographs firstly show what the anthropologist/photographer wants to show in its framing; secondly, allow the observer to see what had not been intended to be shown but is in the image accidentally and, thirdly, they call attention to those aspects which are invisible to the ordinary eye (Pink, Alfonso et al. 2004:150). Hastrup acknowledges those constructs, yet she frames them negatively as: the ‘show up’ effect, the ‘blow up’ effect and the ‘make up’ effect (Hastrup 1992:11-13). Like any other research method, visual research methods have limits, too. Prosser extends two methodological arguments against image-based research. Firstly, photographic equipment and the act of shooting make researchers more visible. They are, thereby, damaging rapport and inhibiting participants’ everyday behaviour and activities. This is called ‘procedural reactivity’. Secondly, ‘personal reactivity’ refers to the impact of idiosyncratic behaviour and personal characteristics of the researcher. The image researcher might be ‘insufficiently self-conscious as the act of creating an image requires a
combination of personal awareness of knowledge selection and (as a basis for making decisions) technical, and artistic judgements (Prosser 1998:104). Knowles and Sweetman assert yet more difficulties. Visual methods suffer from their ‘association with morally and scientifically dubious projects in the past’, their present association with surveillance, the problem of ascribing anonymity or confidentiality to people who have been photographed, equipment costs, difficulties with dissemination and issues of copyright and the fact that images are highly selective and can be manipulated. The polysemic nature of images, compared with spoken language or written texts, is the most important objection against visual methods within social and cultural research (Knowles and Sweetman 2004:12). According to critics pictorial ambiguity renders “analysis of such material highly subjective, and within certain traditions this is regarded as problematic” (ibid.). Photographs are by their nature selective and through the cultural bias in the way of seeing (by the researcher) they can be biased (Banks and Morphy 1997:7). Whereas visual research can be easily conducted in public places, it is much more challenging and complex to conduct visual research of interior culture, for example inside people’s houses (Hockings 1995:239). Moreover, the meanings of photographs are arbitrary and subjective, they depend on who is looking (Pink 2007:67). Pink further remarks that the meanings given to photographs may be instable and may need to be renegotiated (Pink 2007:68). Prosser extends the argument that photographs could display a lack of contextual validity (Prosser 1998:104). However, while such weaknesses certainly have some foundations, they fail to notice comparable difficulties with other forms of research and other forms of research material. In considering the criticism levelled at visual material Howard Becker, for example, points out that “every form of social science
data has exactly these problems, and ... none of the commonly accepted and widely
used sociological methods solves them very well either” (Becker 1998:91).
Writing and speaking is, intrinsically polysemic, too. Knowles and Sweetman also
point out that:

the apparent ambiguity of pictorial representation is only really a difficulty if
one is working within a realist paradigm, and seeking to establish truths
rather than interpretations. It can, in fact, be regarded as a positive
advantage if one is seeking to allow for multiple interpretations.

(2004:13)
The authors stress that “in their ability to convey the emotional tone of an event,
photographs are potentially less ambiguous – or even misleading – than other
forms of qualitative data” (ibid.).

However, at least one of the main arguments against the use of images in
cultural and social research has in recent years been turned into strengths: its
reflexivity. Whereas in years past it was assumed that a photograph depicts
reality, it has now been recognised that a photograph is a construct which is
related to the reality it encodes (Banks and Morphy 1997). This realisation led
image-researchers to ask three different sets of questions: firstly, what is the
image? What is its content? Secondly, who took it or made it? When and why was
the image made? Thirdly, how do other people come to have it, how do they read it
and what do they do with it (Banks 2001:7)? As Jenks maintains, pictorial
representation is like all other forms of representation about selection, abstraction
and transformation (Jenks 1995:8).

The strength of photography as a research instrument is the immediate
identification of authentic features, as demonstrated in the production processes in
two of Contact’s projects: Memories of the Rain and Moston D.N.A. The medium of
photography is able to compare often small features bringing out the differences. Using images can bring out some of the differences. An image is a parallel medium, since all information exerts its influence on the viewer at the same time. Writing, on the other hand, is sequential. Information can only be conveyed lineally. In other words, the context becomes visually better accessible when photography is used as a research method. Photography, in the context of a rehearsal process, becomes a way of recognising subtle differences and of uncovering.

The last words in this section on visual methods shall be given to Knowles and Sweetman. They aptly summarise the strengths and limits visual methods as a discipline of communication:

As analytical and practical devices, visual data both connect and refract, capturing the specificity of social processes and phenomena, and thereby illustrating the general in the particular, while also offering a particular means of illuminating and exploring the relationship between the two. As communicative devices, visual data can also be particularly emotive and evocative, while visual methods are inclusive in the sense that the data are both accessible and can often be produced by both researcher and researched alike. (Knowles and Sweetman 2004:13)

3.1.4 Creative Workshops

Sight says too many things at one time or has got there without being consciously processed as a “datum” of experience. It is at once forgotten and remembered. (Bachelard and Jolas 1969: 215)

How do casual users experience productions at Contact and which creative formats can be used to find out? This study combines participant observation with more open-ended methodologies: the exploration of experiences with participative drama workshop methods.
Gauntlett argues that the creative investigation of people's experiences is driven by the belief that creative research methods will produce results which are ‘truer to life’ and therefore intrinsically better (Gauntlett 2007:92ff).

Creative workshops are engaging with immediate, embodied experiences of Contact's users. What are the advantages of using this method? Creative workshops provide a space for group dynamics, that is, thinking which is influenced by the presence and contribution of several members of a group. Those contributions might have different qualities, which might be congruent with individual contributions. However, contributions in workshops rely on a process by which a majority of the group must be in agreement with or unmotivated to oppose opinions of vocal minorities or a majority of the group in question. Which specific qualities might responses in a group workshop possess? They will, especially in the workshops reflected upon here, be influenced by the physical nature of the workshops. Participants in the workshops had to negotiate their way across a performance space and physically get to the floor to read the question and make their contribution in a form they could choose: drawing, scribbling or writing. This is in opposition to research situations in which participants sit down and deliver their contributions mostly verbally or as a mix between verbal and graphic responses. Walking around, either in the workshop space or in Contact's building, is also an important part of the workshop. Amato (2004) points out in “A History of Walking” referring to the history of mass transportation that:

whenever train, bus, car and truck penetrated, human destiny was separated from going on foot, and consequently reordered senses of space, locality, distance, movement and body arose.  

(2004: 257)
So, may be, walking reconstitutes the human senses of space, place, locality, distance, movement, body and also memory.

Walking has continued to be a focus in urban regeneration. Increasingly it is understood that the walker makes and becomes the city he or she walks. (2004: 253)

The workshop situation, and walking within it, organise the ways in which participants access their memory. The physical action not only helps participants access their memories but their physical actions support them to 'become' a part of the performance they have previously been attending. It could be argued that casual users are co-creating their own version with the help of their memory. This physical act of recreation means that many more senses are likely to be triggered in a workshop. The link to memory might, in this way, be argued to be more detailed, rich and complex. This, in turn, allows for better informed research and a better representation of casual users’ experiences in audience research. From the aforementioned it can be deducted that the physical way of triggering the senses (redoing, reliving) is likely to provide better results because they are informed by more than one sense. Creative forms of investigating casual users’ experiences can also, at least potentially, give access through a physical re-living of memories which would otherwise only be accessible through much more intense research efforts.

Summing up, it can be said that workshops will provide the researcher with a much richer and more complex representation of the research situation and respondents’ experiences and responses.
3.1.5 Focus groups

So far, this chapter has looked at different methods which originate outside audience research and reception studies. Now we will turn to methods which are used more often in these fields. In this study, interviews were used at several points. On one occasion, however, a focus group/group interview was the preferred option. This is because the views and opinions of a group of Contact’s young leaders were the focus rather than that of individuals. Focus groups “consist of a small groups of people who are brought together by a ‘moderator (the researcher) to explore attitudes and perceptions, feelings and ideas about a specific topic” (Denscombe 2010:177). They are a special case of qualitative interview which have at least three distinguishing features. Firstly, the group discussion is based on an item or an experience about which all participants have roughly the same knowledge. Secondly, they place particular emphasis on the interaction within the group and, thirdly, the researchers’ role is to facilitate the group interaction rather than lead the discussion (ibid.). Focus groups have the advantage that the number and range of participants can be increased dramatically. Each question is prompting a response from more than one person. It is advantageous that interviewees can respond and also question the responses of fellow respondents and the conversation is cross-fertilised.

3.2 Traditional audience research methods

3.2.1 Qualitative, semi-structured Interviews

The following section is dealing with qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Why have such interviews been used? Semi-structured interviews have been utilised because they provide one of the best available means for “accessing answers to
complex research questions and for revealing subjugated knowledge” (Hesse-Biber 2010:v). Moreover, semi-structured interviews are one of the best available options to explore “complex and subtle phenomena such as opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences” of Contact users (Denscombe 2010:173). Moreover, the deployment of more qualitative instruments promises adequate results in response to the research question: What are the roles and experiences of Contact’s users?

What is an interview? Kvale defines qualitative research interviews as a conversation between an interviewer and interviewee which seeks to describe and uncover the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subjects. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees says. (1996:31)

Interviews, as a method of market research, often seek straightforward factual information. However, as Terkel argues, interviewing understood in this way has its limits:

I realized quite early in this adventure that interviews, conventionally conducted, were meaningless. Conditioned clichés were certain to come. The question-and-answer technique may be of some value in determining favoured detergents, toothpaste and deodorants, but not in discovery of men and women. (Terkel in: Douglas 1985:7)

The potential of interviews as data collection method is best exploited when applied to the exploration of more complex and subtle phenomena such as opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences (Denscombe 2010:173). There are three types of research interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Fontana and Frey 2005). Structured interviews, or also standardised interviews or researcher-administered surveys, tightly control the questions, their order and often provide pre-coded answers. A set of predefined questions are asked and
they are asked in the same order for all respondents. This standardisation is intended to minimise the effects of the instrument and the interviewer on the research results. Structured interviews are similar to surveys except that they are administered verbally rather than in writing. Structured interviews are, therefore, often used to collect quantitative data for surveys which collect large volumes of data from a wide range of respondents. Recent survey research has seen the introduction of ‘computer-assisted personal interviewing’ (CAPI) which seeks to eliminate errors in the collection of the data and allows for a quick analysis (Gubrium and Holstein 2001; Oishi 2003; Denzin and Lincoln 2008 (a)). A semi-structured interview is a qualitative method of inquiry that combines a pre-determined set of open questions; questions that prompt discussion, with the opportunity for the interviewer to explore particular themes or responses further (Kvale 1996; Kvale 2008; King and Horrocks 2010). Unlike structured interviews they do not limit respondents to a set of pre-determined answers. Semi-structured interviews allow respondents to discuss and raise issues that may not have been considered before. They are more open and more flexible than structured interviews (Drever 2003; Harrell, Bradley et al. 2009). Interviewers still follow a list of issue to be addressed, however, they encourage the interviewee to develop their own ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised. Semi-structured interviews emphasise the interviewee’s interests and, most importantly, their answers are open ended. Semi-structured interviews are often employed in qualitative research. Unstructured interviews, also informal conversational interviews, in-depth interviews, non-standardised interviews or ethnographic interviews, are even more open than their semi-structured variation. They emphasise the role of the interviewee and encourage researchers to observe.
Unstructured interviews, are defined in different ways by Punch (1998), Patton (2002) and Minichiello (1990). Punch, for example, described unstructured interviews as a way to understand the complex behaviour of people without imposing any a priori categorization. For Patton, unstructured interviews are a natural extension of participant observation. He argues that the researcher is responsible to start the conversation and then, ideally, fades into the background. Minichiello (1990) sees unstructured interviews as interviews which rely on social interaction between the researcher and the informant. Neither the question nor the answer categories are predetermined.

There are clear advantages of using interviews as a research method. Interviews provide a great depth of information, produce valuable insights, require only simple technical equipment, produce data based on the priorities of the interviewee, are a very flexible research instrument, have a high response rate and research material can be checked for accuracy and relevance as they are collected. Interviews also have some disadvantages. The method is time-consuming; research material which is ‘open format’ and not pre-coded is difficult to analyse; consistency and accuracy are hard to achieve; the status of the interviewer is (usually) higher than the interviewee (the interviewer effect); the interview itself is an artificial situation which can be daunting for certain people; the recording equipment can inhibit interviewees; interviewers can, potentially, invade privacy and upset respondents; and the method can be relatively expensive in terms of the interviewer’s time and travel needs (Denscombe 2010:192-4). Moreover, Wengraf argues that qualitative research interviewing has a tendency to ‘under-theorise’ its research material:
[i]nterviews are culturally and historically specific phenomena, to be studied as a practice or set of practices [...]. I have argued that without such research into interviews as a located socio-historical practice, and interferences about the ‘functions of gaining and changing knowledge’ through any particular interview interaction is likely to be naïve.

(Wengraf 2001:50)

### 3.2.2 Video Interviews and Questionnaires

Why are short, situational video interviews used in this study? Video interviews are used here because they provide a means to get responses from people with a wide range of different backgrounds in terms of their age, ethnicity and personal background. Many Contact users’ would not normally fill in a paper questionnaire. Questionnaires are perceived as a too formal, time consuming and cumbersome way of collecting information. Therefore, they are less well accepted among Contact’s mainly young users. Experience has shown that the response rate to long, formal questionnaires at Contact tends to be very low. One of the reasons for this is that many people who go to Contact access it because it is perceived as a very ‘informal venue’. However, video interviews meet the needs of the mostly young, diverse, technophile and often media-savvy Contact clientele ‘half way’. They are perceived to be acceptable because they give the impression of a young medium which is up-to-date and somewhat ‘exciting’ to use. The informality of the medium outweighs the formality of the feedback giving situation. Video interviews are therefore a more tolerable way for young and diverse groups of people to provide information.

Short, situational video interviews are a combination of qualitative interviewing and filmic ethnography (Crang and Cook 2006). They are characterised by their shortness (approximately one minute) and the fact that the
interviewees are in the environment about which they are questioned. Many interviewees just came out of performances or events when they were approached. Their impressions and memories of the performance or Contact itself were, therefore, still fresh. In short video interviews ‘open’ and ‘closed’ questions are asked (Gillham 2000:3). One could argue that short video interviews occupy a place half way between unstructured ‘listening to other people’s conversations’ and ‘structured questionnaires’ (ibid.). Short video interviews are just one among some emerging techniques which go ‘beyond the standard interview’ (Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Corbin and Morse 2003; Gubrium and Holstein 2003; Bagnoli 2009).

Both, the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative interviewing are recognised here. The main advantage of qualitative interviewing is the depth of the generated material. Respondents can elaborate on their opinions and respond to follow on questions. Video interviews are also useful to test out responses to a particular issue. They may throw a completely different light on an issue that the interviewer had previously not considered (Wimmer and Dominick 1997:139). It is important that respondent have the freedom to answer how they wish, as this can give them a feeling of control in the interview situation. The amount of time needed to collect and analyse the responses are a distinct disadvantage of general interviewing practices (Wimmer and Dominick 1997:139). Time has not been an issue for this investigation because the short video interviews were conducted by Contact’s hosts. They mainly interviewed casual users after performances, events and festivals at Contact. The hosts are local young people who have often been involved in Contact programmes such as CYAC, Young Identity or Future Fires and work on a part-time basis. They host all of Contact’s in-house and off-site
performances as well as all events taking place in the building such as festivals, conferences and conventions. It has been a disadvantage on reflection, however, that the interviews were carried out by many different hosts since their levels of confidence differed considerably. The quality of the interviews has, therefore, varied. This is despite the fact that the hosts were briefed about the importance of the interviews, that they had the opportunity to conduct practice interviews and were also given the questions well in advance. However, due to the part-time nature of their employment some hosts could not be trained and had to rely on short briefings from different managers and their own initiative.

Short video interviewing is a form of qualitative interviewing which involves a person who is equipped with a camera. The interviewer approaches another person and asks if he or she would be willing to answer a few questions. If the interviewee agrees, the interviewer asks the questions and the responses are then filmed. The answers provide a rich source of data. In the case of video research at Contact a similar protocol is followed. Firstly, Contact hosts inform casual users that Contact cooperates with the University of Manchester in a research project about casual users’ experiences. Then hosts ask whether a casual uses would answer a few short questions. If they agree hosts ask a few questions ‘live on camera’. The questions are open and are related to Contact, the performance in question and casual users’ experiences compared to other theatrical events. The questions casual users faced when they are on their way out are focussed on experiences of the building (which includes again any aspect of their stay from legroom in the auditorium to the draft from the door in the Lounge), the event patrons have just witnessed, or how casual users’ experiences

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43 In this research project small, palm sized camcorders were used.
compared with events in other theatres. Video research is usually conducted in the Contact ground floor foyer.

Hosts ask casual users in two different scenarios: on their way in they are asked what they expect from their time at Contact. On their way out they are asked about their experiences.\textsuperscript{44} People on their way into the building in the evening might not only come to see a show, some use the computers, the Lounge, the decking area outside or the foyers. Others come in to see an exhibition, meet socially or rehearse.

Due to constraints, however, short video interviews for incoming patrons have been limited. Hosts are employed ‘to host people coming to events’ and improve their overall experience of Contact. In practise, hosts rarely have the time to approach casual users when they enter the building as they have to fulfil other duties first. This is a limitation of the current study, which need to be addressed in future research. Due to those limitations the short video interviews concentrated on casual users leaving the Contact building after a performance. They were asked to respond to the following questions: Firstly, what do you think about the performance you have just seen? Secondly, what do you like about Contact?

\textsuperscript{44} It is difficult to ask the same users twice in order to compare their expectations and experiences. There is, on the other hand, an argument among some staff members in Contact’s Marketing department that the same audience members should not be approached twice. It is argued that when audience members are asked to give up their time more than once in the course of one evening they might feel ‘picked upon’. They might, it is implied, think twice before coming back when they feel that Contact makes unduly demands on their time and patronage. It is also argued that regular audiences are much more likely to be asked repeatedly as they are in the house more often. Patrons are seen as valuable to Contact and so is their time. Contact is sending out a number of marketing materials to regular customers each week. As that is seen as taking up audiences time utmost care is used when audience members are approached for giving up their time for other Contact related business.
Thirdly, how does your experience compare to theatrical events in other theatres?\footnote{The questions which Contact’s hosts asked have evolved over the months. As relatively little training could be provided hosts have independently, and changing from performance to performance, modified some or all of the questions of the ‘script’ described above. Often, those questions which hosts feel more confident about were asked. From time to time, however, the script has been amended due to the demands of special events or festivals such as the Flying Solo Festival in spring 2011.}

Interviewing casual users directly after performances has distinct advantages. Generally, casual users are affected in one way or another by performances. The mood and thoughts triggered by performances, if any, are taken out of performance spaces and the wider Contact building and into the world. In a mental and physical way, casual users are often still under the influence of what they have experienced when they are about to leave the building. Although the performance as one of the central elements of theatre-going might be over, casual users are still in the midst of their theatre-going experience. However, only a few minutes have elapsed since casual users have left the place of the performance when they are approached for a few reflective sentences. Casual users’ memories are still fresh with lingering impressions of the performance. Upon physically leaving the performance space they enter Contact’s foyer. The foyer, therefore, is a transitory space between the performance space and the world outside.

Acoustically, the place of the video interviews has sometimes proved to be problematic. The foyer, in which most of the video interviews are conducted, is after a show a vibrant and busy place. Casual users are coming and going, people talk to their friends and noise levels are often rather high. Additionally to the background human noise comes the music playing in the bar and the foyer.
Accordingly, the acoustic and visual shortcomings of the video recordings need to be accepted.

After the video interviews were conducted and transcribed, they were analysed. In a first step those parts of the short video interviews were coded and then grouped. In a number of steps the research material within each section was fine-coded again.

**Questionnaires:**
Why are questionnaires used as one research method in this study?

Questionnaires are used here as a means to gather information from casual users about *People in Glass Cases Shouldn’t Throw Stones*, a site-specific performance. They provide an accessible way to gather information for two purposes: firstly, to get responses about the performance, about the suitability of the venue (Manchester Museum) for a Contact performance and about Contact, itself. Secondly, questionnaires were also used to identify respondents willing to take part in a longitudinal study in regard to their above mentioned responses. It was clearly appropriate to use questionnaires because large numbers of respondents needed to participate, the information sought was fairly straightforward, brief and uncontroversial; the standardised data could be collected without face-to-face interaction, it could be expected that the majority (if not indeed all respondents) were able to read and understand and respond to the questions in writing and the social climate was open so that full and honest answers could be expected (Denscombe 2010:156).

A questionnaire is a survey which collects information which can subsequently be used for analysis of the research material. It consists of a written list of questions, which ask respondents directly about the points of interest for the
research (Oppenheim 1992; Munn and Drever 1999; Gillham 2000).

Questionnaires offer certain advantages compared with other research methods: they are economical and deliver a considerable amount of research material (data) for a relatively low cost in terms of materials, money and time; are simple to arrange; supply standardised answers; provide little scope for contamination of the collected material through ‘interpersonal factors’; provide pre-coded answers, which allow for speedy collation and analysis; and, finally, make the task of respondents easy as they can simply choose from a range of pre-given answers (Denscombe 2010:169). Questionnaires also have certain disadvantages: some respondents might find pre-coded answers restricting and frustrating and they might prevent them from answering; pre-coded answers might prejudice the findings away from the respondent’s and towards the researcher’s perception of matter; and, lastly, since answers are provided ‘at a distance’ the questionnaires offer little opportunity for the researcher to check the truthfulness of the responses (ibid.:170).

For the purpose of this study questionnaires were distributed among casual users after the end of the performance of Glass Cases. An extraordinarily high return could be achieved: out of a total of 150 casual users 46 93 filled in the forms. This amounts to almost two-thirds of all casual users who ordered tickets at the Contact box office.47 The questionnaire asked 17 questions relating directly to

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46 Each of the six shows had 25 ticketed audience members. The tickets were free. Audience members, however, had to phone the box office at Contact to reserve a ticket.

47 However, only estimates of the overall amount of audiences can be made since there was a marked overlap between audience members and visitors of the Manchester Museum. Although only 25 tickets were allocated per performance the number of people actually watching the performance sometimes doubled. This sometimes created problems for the ‘flow’ of those visitors who wanted to engage with the museum. As Glass Cases often utilised small spaces and hall ways audiences sometimes blocked passage ways for periods of time. As audiences needed no tickets and the performance took place
casual users’ perceptions of the performance (see the Appendix B). It also enquired about their expectations and about some personal attributes. It finally asked whether casual users would be happy to take part in a telephone conversation at a later date.

Twenty five out of 90 casual users who filled in the questionnaire agreed to be contacted. Out of those 25, 20 were contacted after four weeks after the last performance of Glass Cases. Out of those 20, 10 were contacted again after four months. On both occasions a set of 18 questions were asked. Most questions were relating to what participants remembered and what made them remember certain aspects of the performance. The interviews were mainly conducted as telephone interviews. Some were also conducted on a face-to-face basis were the distance allowed both parties to come together in this way. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Those ‘follow on’ interviews after four weeks and four months were are part of the longitudinal research strategy which tracked changes after four weeks and four months time.

The questionnaire asked casual users to tick one of the four boxes relating to their age: 11 – 18; 19 – 30; 31 - 65 and 65 +. At Contact it is generally assumed that its performances attract young people. As mentioned earlier, young people for Contact means 15 to 25 year olds. It would therefore be reasonable to expect amongst a multitude of other museum activities, visitors were free to join the audiences. Therefore, the groups of audience members of each show were almost constantly shifting in size. The audience group setting of in the beginning of Glass Cases was rarely exactly the same which arrived for the last scene in the Mammal Gallery. After the end of the performance, audiences had to find their way back from the Mammal Gallery to the exit at the ground floor of the Manchester Museum. Audiences often took their time on their return. That many chose the ‘long way ‘round’ arguably contributed to their willingness to fill in the questionnaires. The relatively long period of time between the end of the performance and the point at which audiences and visitors would be approached to fill in a questionnaire seemed to have a positive effect. As can be seen by the quantity of returned questionnaires many audiences and visitors alike were sympathetic to the idea to use the questionnaires as a ‘first prompt’ to re-consider their experiences of the performance.
casual users to be between 11 and 19 years of age. The questionnaire showed that the biggest group of casual users of *Glass Cases* is between 19 and 30 years of age. 33 casual users ticked this box. This is on the upper end and beyond Contact’s target group age. However, at the same time it shows that there is a difference between Contact’s long-term and its casual users. Generally speaking, grown up people are more likely to frequent Contact’s performances as casual users. Young people between the ages of 15 and 25 are more likely to take part in one of Contact’s programmes first before they begin to frequent Contact’s performances.\(^{48}\)

The second biggest group was that of casual users between 31 and 65 years of age, 27 belong to this group. The third largest group was comprised by those audience members between the ages of 11 and 18; 17 ticked this box. Only a very small number of audience members said that they belonged to the age group above 65 years of age; 4 ticked this box.

In terms of their gender, the casual users of *Glass Cases* were dominated by women, 59, as opposed to 26 men (59f/26m). In some cases casual users did not indicate their gender. Most casual users stated that they were living in Greater Manchester. Very few people lived outside of this area. Most of those who lived elsewhere came from the North of England, Lancashire or Cumbria. Two casual users came from Wales and Scotland, and two from the Netherlands. In terms of their ethnic origin most people declared themselves to be either white, British or a combination of both. More than eighty percent of all casual users fall into this category.

\(^{48}\) More longitudinal research needs to be conducted to establish if this finding from a small number of performances can be generalised.
Those who have been to the Manchester Museum once, twice or more often are the majority of casual users (64). Most respondents to the questionnaire have either never been to Contact (31) or go there often (30). Twenty three have been to Contact ‘once or twice’ or several times (23). A majority of casual users who filled in the questionnaire came especially for the performance of Glass Cases to the museum (60). Most casual users also came with their family and friends (60). Those who pre-booked and those who just walked up on the day (39) are almost equal in numbers. Most casual users planned to go to the performance in advance (52). All but three audience members found that the Manchester Museum as setting for the performance of Glass Cases was either: exciting (37), surprising (34) or suitable (23) for the performance.

Most audience members could hear everything that was going on during the performance of Glass Cases (42). Still a large number (37) could ‘mostly’ hear what was going on. Most casual users could ‘mostly’ see what was going on during the performance (57). However, only 21 audience members said that could see everything. That means that almost seventy casual users could not see everything that was going on during the performance.

Most casual users stated that the performance enhanced their impression of the museum (57). Twenty six casual users, on the other hand, said that the performance had no impact at all on their impression of the museum. A majority of casual users said that the performance made them feel: happy (48), engaged (38), surprised (27), confused (25), inspired (15) or enlightened (9). However, a small number of casual users also said that the performance made them feel bored (6), tired (5), and angry (2). One casual user said that Glass Cases made him feel sad (1).
The majority of casual users answered that they felt to have interacted ‘a bit’ with the performers during the performance (61). Fifteen felt that they were interacting not at all and 9 audience members felt they interacted a lot with the performers.

3.3 The research journey and the evolution of the theoretical approach

Researchers tend to begin their fieldwork from a wide range of different relationships to the subject of their research. In some cases, a researcher may already be a specialist practitioner of the activity she or he is studying. [...] Other ethnographers who seek to learn about other people’s experiences and meanings [...] may not have such an established basis of specialist embodied knowledge. (Pink 2009:52)

Pink indicates in the above passage, that one of the fundamental differences between empirical sciences and art-based research is the role of the Artist/Researcher/Teacher-Topographer (A/R/T) in the research process. Art-based researchers, unlike researchers in the natural or the social sciences, are sometimes artists and teachers, too. A/R/Teacher-Topographers (to borrow a term from Irwin (2004)), therefore, play a different part in the research process than researchers in the natural sciences. Art-based researchers need to expose their biases and their positions as insiders to further the aims of their research. In the field of fine arts research the term A(rtist)/ R(esearcher)/ T(eacher)-topographer has come to reflect the complexities of the position of researchers in art-based contexts.

Especially the first stage of the research process has been informed by assumed ‘scientific’ notions of what it means to ‘do audience research’. These perceptions have been informed by the perceived value of ‘scientifically’ informed
ways of knowing and doing research, which, roughly, rest in principles of (using the definition of the Oxford English dictionary) "systematic observation, measurement, and experiment, and the formulation, testing, and modification of hypotheses" (Murray 1970). The focus on Contact users' roles and experiences – as opposed to the clarity of Schön's 'high ground' of 'scientific' methods – led to an acknowledgement of a complexity or messiness of Contact's users. Initially, this was perceived as 'negative,' threatening and as non-compliant with humanities' methods.

This study, as any other research project, has roots going deep into the past. Here, these roots are twofold: they refer to Contact and also to my own roots in artistic practice, teacher training and academic studies. It is important to acknowledge my position as artist, teacher and researcher as an integral part of this study. My position in this inquiry is characterised through the combination of artist, researcher and teacher in Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies and an arts-based enquiry. I have been an artist associated with professional theatres and a teacher at university drama departments before I began to frame my theatrical explorations as 'research'. The extended exposure to the professional theatre in an international context marks me as somebody who is experienced in the fields of theatre practice and teaching. I, therefore, started this study of Contact's users as an insider. I was familiar with the 'classic paradigm' as I began this study. My theatrical background had endowed me with a bias which led me to believe that in practical and theoretical terms most 'theatre' in the Western world was identical with the 'classic paradigm'. My combined knowledge of theatre and scientific inquiry predisposed me to make a distinction between 'doing research' and 'doing theatre'. This led me to assume that the two had intrinsically different values
expressed in different ways of ‘doing research’ and ‘doing (theatre) art’. The separation of scientific and artistic knowledge influenced especially the first stages of the research process.

A diffuse focus on audiences and participants characterised the second stage, that of research material collection. The complexity of Contact users’ practices made them stand out from the field of audience and reception studies. Due to the diffuseness of the concept attached to the object of research a variety of methods and an open-ended way of inquiry had to be relied upon. This open-endedness manifested itself in an interdisciplinary approach to the investigation. A proper ‘scientific method’ was still the perceived ideal of the data collection phase. Art-based methods had, however, already become part of the collection of research material (or data). They ‘slipped in’ through time pressure and the need to collect research material before either the object or research or an overview of methods was available.

During the third stage of the investigation, the insights of McNiff (1998; 2003; 2004) Leavy (2009), Gallas (1994) and Arnheim (2004) rendered some of the tacit underpinnings of research in arts-based settings explicit. These authors argue for the inclusion of the background and biases of the researcher. In theoretical terms they point out: firstly, the intrinsic value of art-based methods; secondly, the usefulness of art-based approaches to research and, thirdly, the multidisciplinary nature of the investigation in art-based settings. These acknowledgements are of importance as they touch on the essence of this work: its partial foundation in the processes and the practices of the arts, humanities and social sciences and also the interdisciplinary character of the study.
During the third stage, however, a view began to surface which made the case for arts-based methods as intrinsic part of research endeavours in this artistic contexts. Arts-based methods are best suited to investigate artistic contexts because they bring an innate understanding of the special qualities of artistic processes to the research and approach the context in interdisciplinary ways. Artistic methods of knowing (or practices) are often subject to different ways of going about ‘doing research’. It is an accepted practice in both the natural and the social sciences to select a research method before the start of a research project. This is difficult to do in art-based inquiries. Art-based disciplines often have different methodological priorities. They base research on artistic practice rather than pre-established methodologies and methods. Inquiries in this field are customarily centred with a research question and, thereafter, allowed to run its artistic and creative course. In the end of the research process methodologies and methods are identified and theorised by reflecting back on the research process.

Both, scientific and artistic knowing complement each other. Art-based research methods, therefore, form an essential extension of qualitative methodologies and methods.

**In search of a ‘method:’ a research journey**

The next part of this chapter will trace the methods ‘journey’ of this study. This study represents a journey through at least three different methodological phases and utilises the social subjectivist paradigm. The result of this process represents a ‘bricolage’ of methodologies and methods (Derrida 1978 (a)). The first phase is represented by the initial stages of the research, the second phase is concerned with the methods used for the collection of research material (or data).
and the third stage embraces the reflection about the process and the results of the research.

I arrived at the first phase of this study equipped with the knowledge of a limited number of research methods. Those methods mainly belong to the school of hermeneutics in the tradition of the theologian Schleiermacher, the philosopher Dilthey and their existentialist followers Heidegger and Gadamer.⁴⁹ I had been acculturated to those research methods (Aldridge 1993) by the drama and theatre departments in which I had studied previously.

Hermeneutic theory is part of the social subjectivist paradigm where meaning is inter-subjectively created, in contrast to the empirical universe of assumed scientific realism (Berthon, Pitt et al. 2002:416). Hermeneutic methods applied to theatre studies had, in my experience, been almost exclusively directed towards the investigation of performers, directors and productions. It is one of the strengths of the hermeneutic approach that it acknowledges the economic, social and cultural context of theatre productions, companies and genres (Fiebach 1975; Münz 1979; Hasche, Schölling et al. 1994; Fiebach and Mühl-Benninghaus 1997; Fischer-Lichte 2005). However, in most of the works of the aforementioned authors the viewpoint of the spectator is largely neglected.⁵⁰ In terms of its

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⁴⁹ Compare Heidegger (1927; 1962) and Gadamer (1975). See also Gumbrecht (2004) for an account of how Dilthey’s work at the University of Berlin (Germany) led to the split between the “experimental school of research, based on measurement and other scientific methods of investigation, and, on the other, a philosophical approach that relied on the traditions and intuitions of understanding” (2004:43-44). Dilthey’s initiative, in the end, established the Geisteswissenschaften (arts and humanities as opposed to the natural sciences) as we know them today.

⁵⁰ This, on the surface, could be seen to contradict Martin and Sauter’s view that, in theoretical terms, hermeneutics “points out the spectator as the major player in the theatre” (Martin and Sauter 1995:60). Their assertion might, in fact, be just one way of applying hermeneutics to theatre studies. It is, at the same time, possible, to use hermeneutics in theatre departments and bypass one of its major considerations. In my experience of hermeneutics in theatre studies, the spectator was so much neglected that the first audience research project I came across left me asking what exactly audience
methods the hermeneutic approach largely depends on questionnaires and interviews. It was clear from the outset of this investigation that questionnaires and interviews would not work as the main research method for Contact’s young and diverse users.

The second methodological phase of this study was characterised by a search for appropriate methods for the investigation of Contact’s users. The first phase had been (in)formed by hermeneutic thinking about performers, directors and genres. In contrast, the social sciences offer a number of methods for the investigation of social phenomena; these include: focus groups, semi-structured interviews, diaries, photo and video elicitation and also emerging methods like feminist methods, critical, collaborative ethnography or multi-methods research. The social sciences, represented in this study by social anthropology, visual anthropology and ethnography, are largely united by an affirmation of sociological post-empiricist principles developed by sociologists like Weber and Simmel and philosophers like Popper and Kuhn. However, sociological post-empiricism, although rejecting some of the major tenets of positivism, preserves its ontological realism and the possibility and desirability of objective truth. Sociological post-empiricism is critical of positivism and, rather, develops qualitative-empiricist and subjective approaches to research.

The third methodological phase overlapped with the second phase. While the search for more appropriate methods was still ongoing, the collection of research material started. As in other arts-based research, the research material

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research is about and what it is dealing with? I realised that my studies had been devoid of tools, concepts and methods of thinking about the role of spectators in the theatre.

51 See also (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006)
(or data) for this study was collected in a similar fashion to artists engaging in research. For artists it is impossible to apply pre-conceived methods to research ‘objects’. The research thereby followed research practices often utilised in art therapy settings: firstly, the creative pursuit of new knowledge (through artistic practices) and, secondly, the reflective analysis of methodologies and methods used in the creative process.

The third methodological phase proper was characterised by a search for the location of this study. As I outlined before, hermeneutic methods informed the first phase through research cultures I brought to this inquiry. Hermeneutic methods were, however, unable to cope with the complexity of Contact’s users’ roles and experiences. Therefore, the study turned to methods of the social sciences to address the methodological gap. Several social science methods were not only used but also adapted for this inquiry. The use of social science’ methods moved the locus of the work towards the social sciences. However, social science investigations strive for acceptable outcomes in terms of social science criteria. This study, in contrast, is theatre-based, and therefore, needed to connect back to its theatre context. Through this methodological journey the work becomes visible as located in humanities, social sciences and in the arts:

Seeing methodologically through an artful eye reflects a way of being in the world as a researcher that is paradigmatically different from other ways of thinking about and designing research. (Eisner 2008:3)

The above section has described the methodological journey from hermeneutics, via social sciences and art-based research to an integration of social and art-based methods. Research in art-based settings does not lend itself easily to trajectories of research imported from non-arts and humanities-based research. Rather, this
study shares more commonalities of process and methods (and/or practices) with art-based research. Art-based methods are enlarging the epistemological discourse by including distinct artistic ways of understanding into the research process. This investigation, therefore, lays claim to a specific ‘bricolage’-quality. It uses a variety of readily available methods for the investigation of Contact’s users. This multidisciplinary method is, at least in part, a response to users’ proliferation of roles. Established audience and reception research methods are in need of development to cope with developments of contemporary theatre users. It is the reason why researchers are forced to look towards other fields to approach Contact’s users.

This chapter has done two things. It considered, firstly, the methods used for the investigation of users’ roles and experiences and, secondly, rendered the methodological research journey visible. The following chapter is going to examine long-term users’ roles by looking at a CYAC production – *Memories of the Rain* – and an outreach project called *Moston D.N.A.*
Part 2

4 Chapter 4 – Long-term and casual Users as Participants

The last chapter, which ended the first part of this thesis, introduced the methods for the investigation of Contact’s casual and long-term users. It has found that a combination of multiple qualitative methods has a better chance of producing meaningful results. The current chapter – the initial chapter of the second part of this thesis – discusses how practices of Contact users depart from the ‘classic paradigm’. It is the first of two which is mainly concerned with Contact’s long-term users. It uses the research methods to search for answers to the research question: “what are the roles and experiences of people who go to Contact” and what is the ‘core’ of the company. This chapter explores participants’ roles in two Contact ventures: firstly, CYAC’s production of Memories of the Rain and secondly, an outreach project called Moston D.N.A. (Dynamic New Approach). Both case studies investigate young people’s engagement and both utilise visual material.

Why have those two projects – Memories of the Rain and Moston D.N.A. – been selected for this investigation? Both projects sit within Contact’s participatory framework but have very different characteristics. They have been chosen because they are off-site productions, displaying Contact’s ‘philosophy in practice’ outside of its own building. Theatrical off-site productions tend to much clearer represent the values of the delegating organisation: the ethics of the theatre need to be re-produced in unfamiliar conditions and with different people. Outside productions, thereby, make basic principles of the dispatching theatre more clearly visible than in-house productions in much shorter periods of time.
Looking at these two examples makes it possible to better gauge the range of people’s roles involved in a range of Contact’s work. This is especially the case as Memories of the Rain and Moston D.N.A. occupy two ends of a spectrum.

Memories of the Rain, is a devised theatre production comparable with other alternative theatre productions. Memories of the Rain was chosen because it is typical for the work of CYAC, it is ‘site-specific’, devised and a collaboration with an emerging physical and visual theatre company based in São Paulo. Grupo XIX de Teatro an Anglo-Brazilian theatre company which often works in site-specific locations and in physical and visual ways. More importantly, however, Memories of the Rain is a representational play that observes the division of labour of the ‘classic paradigm’. Some people act as performers and others are witnesses to the actions of the former. Both groups play different roles, which are well known to themselves and also to the other group. During a performance both, performers and users, occupy specific areas in the theatre. Both groups rarely crossed over into the area of the other group. To investigate Memories of the Rain makes it possible to demonstrate that the production adheres to the ‘classic paradigm’ and, at the same time, utilises some elements which are uncommon in mainstream repertory theatre. Memories of the Rain enables the investigation of the roles which Contact’s long-term users play in the theatre making.

In contrast to Memories of the Rain, Moston D.N.A. is an outreach project in which Contact acts on behalf of Manchester City Council’s youth service. Moston D.N.A. differs from Memories of the Rain firstly, in the roles of the participants; secondly, its location; thirdly, the use of time and space and, fourthly, the reduced value of traditional theatre conventions in during its execution.
Why, then, was the Moston D.N.A. outreach project chosen? The Moston D.N.A. outreach project makes it possible to investigate the roles young people play in projects which challenge some of the assumptions underlying the ‘classic paradigm’. Moston D.N.A. is a collaboration between Contact and local artists; it takes the form of an outreach project for the young people of Moston, an area located in the outskirts of Manchester. It is a participative multi-art project which aims to firstly, engage young people; secondly, consult them and, thirdly offer opportunities for young people to do street art, DJ-ing, MC-ing, photography, film, theatre and dance.

In the general introduction it was suggested that the ‘classic paradigm’ has, so far, largely been defined three ways; either through an institutional frame, through identifying special qualities in the performable work\(^\text{52}\) or a mixture of the two. Dickie (1974) advances an institutional theory and Beardsley (1982) specific work-qualities.\(^\text{53}\) Finally, Davies (2011) argues for a use of both.

The distinctions made in either the institutional theory, the work-specific or the combined discourse are, at least within in the context of this study, insufficient to bring out the special qualities in Contact’s participatory work. It is, therefore, necessary to extend the existing theoretical approaches. Traditionally mainstream repertory theatres bring together art lovers (in this case: spectators), texts and performers. This approach to theatre represents the ‘classic paradigm’.

\(^\text{52}\) The distinction between ‘work performance’ and ‘performance work’ is put forward by Davies to distinguish between independent work which is seen as having intrinsic value in itself (performance work) and work which realises such qualities through its performance. The former (e.g. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*) is seen as being a work of art in and by itself. Free jazz, for example, is seen as being artistic through its performance. In opposition to *Hamlet*, Free Jazz is not seen as based on a work of art (Davies 2011:18).

\(^\text{53}\) Based on dance performances.
Mainstream repertory theatres need to fulfil at least six primary conditions to comply with the ‘classic paradigm’. A theatre company (one) must motivate spectators (two) to see a ‘text-in-performance’ (three) executed by performers (four). Spectators and performers are provided with, in principle, separated areas, that is a stage and an auditorium (five). The distribution of labour is strictly regulated between them (six): performers are ‘doing’ and the majority of theatre users, the spectators, are witnessing. Some secondary conditions can, for example, refer to the entrance fee, the dress code, the starting time and the duration of the performance.

This chapter investigates casual users’ roles in two projects in relation to the ‘classic paradigm’. The insights of the discussion about practicing theatrical participation in different ways will then inform the discussion of two case studies: firstly, the CYAC production *Memories of the Rain* and, secondly, the *Moston D.N.A.* outreach project. In both cases it will be asked which roles theatre users play within, and beyond, the ‘classic paradigm’. If there are different roles outside of the ‘classic paradigm’ what might they be?’ It is, in short, the ambition to better understand which roles Contact’s long-term users play in two of its off-site productions.

### 4.1 Theatre users and participation

The following passage reviews two concepts of participation. Firstly, in order to provide a context for recent developments in thinking about participation it will be reconsidered how one of the most important arts funding organisations in England, Arts Council England, and recent theatre scholars understand the term. This investigation will examine how participation is understood within the ‘classic
paradigm’. Secondly, it will be shown that Contact understands and practices participation differently. Those two views of participation are the backdrop for the following discussion of two case studies of Contact’s work: *Memories of the Rain* and the *Moston D.N.A.* (Dynamic New Approach). The former is a performance of Contact Young Actors Company and the latter a Contact outreach project. The discussion will investigate how the paradigms underlying Contact’s work affect the roles theatre users play in those two case studies. The term ‘participation’ – in the use of arts organisations and recent scholarship – will be investigated now.

In a recent development the Arts Council England, in their strategy paper *Great Art for Everyone*, acknowledges the changing relationship between the arts and participation:

> At a time when the dizzying potential of digital technology is transforming the way we make, distribute, receive and exchange art it would be absurd to define excellence in the language of the conventional art forms. Art forms are morphing and combining. To be relevant in the 21st century, any definition of excellence has to find room for participation in art, as well as the classical notion of creation. (Arts Council England 2010)

The vocabulary used by the Arts Council England reflects the current thinking among arts administrators, and, therefore, an emerging paradigm. The arts now have to increasingly justify their claim for ‘excellence’ and, therefore, a part of their public funding by incorporating participation into their practices. Participation in the arts is now increasingly seen as a way to achieve utilitarian goals such as:

> Increase[ing] individual well-being, encourage[ing] active citizenship, and contribute[ing] to prosperity locally and nationally. (Arts Council England 2010:10)
The arts in combination with participatory practices are now charged more and more with creating ‘(social) impact’ as Matarasso shows in: *Use or ornament? The social impact of participation in the arts* (1997). Participation has in the thinking of some also become a tool ‘to attract new audiences’ (Arts Council England 2010:20).

In one of the most recent theatre lexica Pavis describes ‘Theatre of Participation’ as follows:

The term would appear to be pleonastic, as there clearly is no such thing as theatre without audience participation, whether emotional, intellectual or physical. ... There is no one form or genre of theatre of participation, but a style of acting and staging that activates the theatre users by inviting them to a dramaturgical reading, a decoding of signs, a reconstruction of the story and a comparison of the reality with their own world.

(Pavis 1998:402-3)

When ‘participation’ is narrowly understood the field of investigation is rather small. Participation in this case often refers to one of three practices: firstly, children or young people directly answer questions or playing a physical part on stage (Theatre in Education (TIE)); secondly, as a practice by politically motivated practitioners such as Boal (1979; 1995; 2006) or, thirdly, as a concept by avant-garde theatre practitioners and theoreticians such as Brecht (1974; 1988), Artaud (2009), Craig (1962; 1963; 1983) and Marinetti (1983; 2006). Contact’s understanding of participatory theatre practices, however, is neither fully represented by Theatre-in-Education, political theatre nor avant-garde theatre. For example, Contact rarely uses methods of Theatre in Education in its productions. It has made little attempt to align itself with any specific theatre
movements, such as Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed.\textsuperscript{54} Over the years Contact has, however, engaged with different strands of theatrical avant-garde movements. Young people from Contact’s Young Actors Company have worked, for example, with Forced Entertainment (UK), the Dende Collective (UK), Boal’s Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed (Brazil), Grupo XIX de Teatro (Brazil) or Coney (UK).

Contact’s core guiding principles are pragmatically orientated towards, firstly, the needs of young people and, secondly, participatory principles. As a participatory theatre, Contact is supporting and challenging young people through a multiplicity of cultural activities. Contact champions their interests in all of its activities. As a participatory theatre it supports young people in adopting practices which, for some of its long-term users, lead them to becoming independent artists. Contact’s participatory theatre practices call traditional understanding of participation and the ‘classic paradigm’ into question.

To recapitulate, participation as understood in the ‘classic paradigm’ goes in line with Way’s view that: “audience participation … is planned, intended, constructive, controlled, purposeful and integrated within the play” [my stress] (Way 1981: 3). Participation in the context of a play was formulated by the same author:

\begin{quote}
The rule of theatre in Western civilisation is: However much you may participate intellectually, emotionally and spiritually, please do not participate \textit{physically} or \textit{vocally}. For the majority of adult audiences the rule, consciously or unconsciously assimilated, is so entrenched that it is difficult for people to break away from it, even when ‘required’ to do so by a particular form of theatre. We are simply not used to giving vocal or
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{54} At the same time some people cooperating with or working at Contact might harbour sympathies for Boal’s views and also his theatre practices. This is, however, different from an endorsement of Boal’s views as a model for the company.
physical reaction to our intellectual, emotional and spiritual participation.  
[stress in the original]  
(Way 1981: 2)

In the ‘classic paradigm’ participation, then, means participation in emotional, 
spiritual and intellectual ways in a play. Vocal and physical participation, within a 
play in the Western theatre tradition, is inhibited if not sanctioned.

How is, then, participation at Contact conceptualised and practised?

Participation at Contact is an inclusive concept. It takes place outside of traditional 
play-participation and within a wide conception of theatre. Participation at 
Contact is the centre of the organisation and goes far beyond audiences’
intellectual, emotional and spiritual participation in a play. It rather becomes the 
intellectual, emotional, spiritual, physical and vocal participation of young people 
in ‘doing theatre’, that means in performing, witnessing, producing, presenting, 
administrating, marketing, creating, conceiving and also in its technical aspects.
‘Doing theatre’ here is seen as a contemporary, dynamic cultural practice which is 
reflecting the world around young people, rather than simply a dedication to 
‘putting on plays’. Participation in the manifold processes of ‘doing theatre’, 
therefore, becomes the means by which young people investigate their own ‘being 
in the world’. Young people’s participation is realised in a variety of programmes 
like Re:con 55, I:CON 56, Future Fires 57, Creative Experts 58 or Cultural Warriors 59

55 Re:Con is “Contact’s Young Programming and Producing Team. It is a pioneering initiative consisting of four young arts practitioners from diverse artistic backgrounds. Working directly with Contact’s programming department, Re:Con have received support and development to become part of the new generation of cultural leaders.” (http://contactmcr.com/projects/its-your-turn/recon/recon-2010-2011/; accessed: 05.03.2012)

56 I:CON is Contact’s new young marketing team. “The team are developing skills in arts marketing from PR, design and social media to creating video promos, blogging and media relations. They are also working towards creating and running the marketing campaign for Re:Con’s event in June 2012.” (http://contactmcr.com/projects/its-your-turn/icon/icon-2011-2012/; accessed 05.03.2012)
Contact Playback, CYAC, Monday Drop, Freestyle Mondays, Media Drop, Rhythm and Words. Participation at Contact can be argued to take on a new and extended meaning. It is rather rare that casual users get on a stage for a short period of time within a Contact performance. Rather, participation at Contact aims to support the ‘artistic, social and personal development’ of young people through a wide variety of measures and programmes. Participatory work is based on the physical, vocal, intellectual, emotional and spiritual participation of young people in all processes of ‘doing theatre’. Young people are taking part in all stages in the inception, preparation, production, distribution and promotion of theatre. Participation as practiced at Contact challenges participation as it is understood in the ‘classic paradigm’ of the Western theatre tradition, as it includes all aspects and all processes of theatre making not just the planned and orchestrated participation within a play. Contact’s long-term users watch performances, spend time in

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57 Futures Fires is a programme which “supports young emerging artists to plan and deliver their own community arts outreach project in Greater Manchester through a tailored programme of training, mentoring and support.” ([http://contactmcr.com/projects/its-your-turn/future-fires/](http://contactmcr.com/projects/its-your-turn/future-fires/); accessed: 05.03.2012)

58 “Contact Creative Experts are a team of young facilitators who provide creative business solutions to help you and your organization work more effectively with young people, develop young leaders and engage hard to reach communities.” ([http://contactmcr.com/hire-us/services/creative-experts/](http://contactmcr.com/hire-us/services/creative-experts/); accessed: 05.03.2012)

59 “Cultural Warriors is a three-year youth leadership collaboration jointly realised by People’s Palace Projects, Grupo Cultural AfroReggae, Contact, Theatre Royal Stratford East, Playing on Theatre Company, Lawnmowers Theatre Company and The Sage Gateshead. The collaboration seeks to build each partner’s capacity in supporting young people to be active and innovative in bringing about change in their communities and the lives of other young people. The Cultural Warriors programme seeks to inspire young people to fight for social transformation through art and culture, realizing their own artistic potential and building the self-esteem and citizenship of young people in their communities. activities between Contact, People’s Palace Projects (UK) and Afroreggae (Brazil).” (cited from an unpublished People’s Palace Projects strategy paper, accessed: 07.03.2012)
performance related events, committees, working groups and work as Contact ambassadors, in workshops and at rehearsals.

It could be argued that Contact is moving towards what Swortzell calls a "Child Art Centre:"

[i]n which a play house designed specifically for young audiences is a major component. Such centres also normally offer art studios and galleries, concert halls, dance and movement spaces, rehearsal areas, and scenic and costume workshops. Sometimes restaurants, snack bars, and meeting rooms are available ... The benefit of bringing all the arts together under one roof fosters greater collaboration and understanding for both young people and the artists.  

(Swortzell 1990: xxxiii)

For Contact the division between young people and artists, especially as practiced in many other youth theatres, is questionable. Why should young people just be observers instead of being involved in 'doing theatre' or becoming 'artists' themselves? In Contact's case more and more artists are working with young people who see themselves as facilitators. Often they work towards enabling young people to become artists themselves. In other cases young people will be supported by professionals to work in youth marketing teams, as technicians, designers, stage managers, producers, ambassadors and, indeed, (artist) facilitators. This participatory approach could be compared with structures of some dedicated young people’s theatres in Eastern Europe:

Theatres in Russia often sponsor clubs that publish letters and magazines announcing activities such as art exhibitions of member's works, special workshops, and social events. The center thus becomes a place not just to see a play, but also to return again and again to follow artistic pursuits and to visit with friends who hold similar interests.  

(Swortzell 1990: xxxiii)
There are, however, also dangers when the state takes on a leading role in the organisation and ideological orientation of young people’s theatres. Van de Water’s: *Moscow theatres for young people: a cultural history of ideological coercion and artistic innovation: 1917-2000* shows this.

Summarising, it can be said that participation as understood in the ‘classic paradigm’ aspires to engage audiences in mental, physical and vocal ways with in a play. There is hardly any intend of note to engage with spectators beyond the frame of this play. Therefore, the aims of participation within the ‘classic paradigm’ could be argued to be ‘short term’. Participation at Contact, however, takes the ‘long view’. This organisation engages continuously with young people and communities. Participation at Contact it is seen as a means for the long-term engagement of young people. It can therefore be argued that Contact’s ‘long-term’ participatory practices diverge from the ‘short-term’ participation practiced within the ‘classic paradigm’.

### 4.2 Case Studies

**Memories of the Rain and Moston-D.N.A.**

This section begins with a short summary of both projects: *Memories of the Rain* and *Moston D.N.A.* Thereafter, the roles young people play in both projects will be investigated.

The CYAC summer production of *Memories of the Rain* is a devised theatre production. It brought a group of young people together with an emerging physical and visual theatre company from Brazil in a historical site. The site itself was chosen with care as it connects Manchester and São Paulo via their shared industrial heritage. In this way, a multi-national group explored some of the
narratives the two industrial cities and their people have created. *Memories of the Rain* is a collaborative effort involving four partners: firstly, Contact’s Creative Development team as producers, Contact’s Young Actors Company (CYAC) as participants, members of the Anglo-Brazilian theatre company Grupo XIX De Teatro as director and designer and Manchester’s Museum of Science and Technology (MOSI) as site for the performance. *Memories of the Rain* is a participatory, off-site production performed by young people from Contact’s Young Actors Company directed/facilitated by Rodolfo Amorium. Amorium is a performer and director of the Anglo-Brazilian theatre company Grupo XIX De Teatro. He was supported in shaping this production by translator, performer and arts facilitator Leo Kay and joined by the designer Renato Bolelli Rebouças. Lowri Evans, a former CYAC member, assisted the director and the creative team.

Amorium, Kay, Rebouças, Evans and a project manager from Contact formed the core creative team. The rehearsals and the performances of *Memories of the Rain* took place in the third floor of a historic railway warehouses dating back to the 1860s. This warehouse now belongs to the Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI). Rehearsals with the director started in the first week of August 2009.

CYAC members rehearsed for three weeks on-site at MOSI. Performance styles and forms of representation were developed in collaboration between the young people and the creative team during the rehearsal period. The industrial heritage of Manchester and Sao Paulo was ‘set’ by Contact’s Creative Development department before the director met the young people. *Memories of the Rain* had six performances; four in the evening and two afternoon matinees. Evening performances ran from Thursday to Sunday of the last week of August 2009 with matinee performances at 3pm on Saturday and Sunday.
The performance of *Memories of the Rain* sits comfortably within the ‘classic paradigm’ because it complies with conditions set by the ‘classic paradigm’. It furthermore closely resembles a mainstream theatrical performance. The six conditions of the ‘classic paradigm’ will now be used to illustrate that *Memories of the Rain* complies with the six conditions established by Davies (2011). Contact, as a theatre company (one) motivated spectators (two) to see a play *Memories of the Rain* (a ‘text-in-performance’) (three). It is a theatre play which was executed by performers (four). Spectators and performers are provided with separated areas, that means a stage and an auditorium (five). The distribution of labour is strictly adhered to (six): the performers are ‘doing’ and the majority of theatre users, the spectators, are witnessing.

*Moston D.N.A.* was a cultural outreach project in which Manchester City Council’s youth service, the Co-operative and Contact, collaborated. This initiative was financed through Manchester’s city council cultural strategy fund and was set in an underprivileged area in the North-East of Manchester. The project was designed to deliver cultural activities in Moston for young people between the ages of “zero to 19.”\(^{60}\) For that purpose a derelict Co-op corner shop in Moston was transformed into a ‘cultural hub’. The project set out to culturally engage young people in different artistic genres such as photography, film, street art, DJ-ing, MC-ing and drama. In parallel, the corner shop exposed young people to art forms such as traditional storytelling, world music and percussion, and experimental theatre (Fahey 2009 (b):1). A team of young artists and arts facilitators from

\(^{60}\) See (Fahey 2009 (b):1).
Contact went to Moston to engage and consult with young people from the area.  

*Moston D.N.A.* was open to the public for eight hours per day, Tuesday to Friday, 12pm to 8pm. The proceedings were observed from March 18 to 21, 2009. This project was seen as a pilot for further cultural initiatives of this kind in other boroughs in Greater Manchester. Contact viewed the project as having two sides: cultural engagement and consultation with local people. Whereas the first was driven and fuelled by Contact’s cultural expertise, the second was equally important, if not more so, for its partners like the North West Development Agency, Arts Council England and Manchester City Council.

Contact’s Creative Development’s Danny Fahey was the lead worker for *Moston D.N.A.* He enlisted several emerging artists with street-cred(ibility) for this project, among them Manchester musician Skittles (Liam Kelly), street artist Dreph (Neequaye Dsane) and trainee artist Sparkz (Aaron Orr), winner of Manchester’s Urban superstar competition in 2009. The experience of the previous year’s project in the same area led Fahey to choose DJ-ing and MC-ing as the core of the engaging art forms. Accordingly, DJs and MCs occupied the only elevated stage of the room. Workshops including photography, film making, street art and drama were also offered. The flyer additionally announced performances from Persia, Tales from the Basement (drama), Akiel Chinelo and Sparkz (Fahey 2009 (a)). The space of the project, a disused Co-op corner shop on 322/330 Moston Lane, offered approximately 100 square meters of rectangular floor space. It had a robust laminate floor, a low ceiling, several pillars, four big shop windows towards the

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61 The project report mentions that the consultation exercise was as important to Manchester city council as the delivery of cultural activities (Fahey 2009 (b)). The *Moston D.N.A.* project, thereby, helped Manchester city council to plan its engagement with local young people in disadvantaged communities in Greater Manchester.
street and a long white wall opposite the window panes. The smaller left hand wall was decorated in a very welcoming way by a Contact designer. On the far side of the room, a stage set the limits of the room and divided it from the rest of the shop. The room was virtually divided in a way that all workshops could theoretically run parallel.

4.3 What is a ‘role’?

In the context of this study ‘roles’ are understood as social roles. In contrast, a role in a theatre is often understood as a ‘character’ in a play or production of a play. Social roles describe and prescribe behaviour (Moreno 1953; Banton 1965; Mead 1972; Biddle 1986). In such a function they are comparable to norms. Roles are behavioural prescriptions that are assigned to people. They can be formal and explicit (for example for employees of the financial sector) or informal and implicit (for example in groups of friends). Hogg (2011:300-1) contends that roles may emerge for a number of reasons: they represent a division of labour; they furnish clear-cut, social expectations within the group, and provide information about how members relate to one another and they furnish members with a self-definition and a place within a group.

The literature distinguishes between two main schools of thinking about roles: firstly, a social psychological and processual and, secondly, a structural and sociological version. Mead (1972), developed an important social psychological approach to a role. He argues that (social) roles are the outcome of open-ended and negotiable interactive processes between people. Mead was especially interested in how children developed their conceptions of their own self and of
society. He argued that children learn by taking, playing and rehearsing the roles of their parents and other adults they come into contact with.

Turner, a sociologist of the “symbolic interactionist” school, developed Meads’ approach further. He sees “role performance as the outcome which is shaped by relevant normative expectations held by people, and then mediated by subjective evaluations, self-interpretations, and by role-playing skills” (Crothers In: Michie 2001:1435). A more structural approach was developed by Linton as early as 1936. He argued that:

[a] role represents the dynamic aspect of a status. The individual is socially assigned to a status and occupies it with relation to other statuses. When he puts the rights and duties which constitute the status into effect, he is performing a role. ... Every individual has a series of roles deriving from the various patterns in which he participates.

(Linton 1936:113-4)

Parsons (1991) is another proponent of the structural-sociological approach. He holds that roles are the building blocks of society. Appropriate behaviour is shaped by internal socialisation into the role and relatively unproblematically carried out by the role occupant. In contrast, Merton (1957:106-20) developed a model which is more conflict oriented. He argued that each social position is linked with an array of complementary ‘role-sets’ and that role occupants relate to different categories of people in each of these.

4.3.1 Roles of theatre users

Typically, people who go to a mainstream repertory theatre are either ‘performer’ or ‘audiences’. In Theatre in Education settings, there is a third group of people, those who participate. What are the roles of Contact’s long-term users and why are they useful in the consideration of ‘roles’, ‘experiences’ and research methods
of Contact users? To look at actual people going to a theatre means to investigate what those people actually do, in contrast to what is conventionally thought they are doing.

A closer investigation of Contact users’ roles has the potential to provide a fuller picture of their practices which can then be compared with traditional roles. There is widespread agreement that people who go to the theatre play one of two roles: they are either performers/actors or spectators. What is an ‘actor’ and what is a ‘spectator’? The term ‘actor’ will be discussed first. What is the nature of this role and the activities connected with it? It is difficult to define what actors are, as their actions ultimately reflect the historically contingent view of society. Pickering, for example, points out that actors have in centuries past been described as ‘immoral’, ‘insane’, ‘holy’ or ‘sublime’ (Pickering 2005:68). They were, therefore, seen as ‘liars’, ‘madman’, ‘saints’ or ‘artists’. However, the same author also suggests that today most scholars can agree with a definition that actors are “people who appear before audiences, pretending to be someone or something other than themselves” (ibid.). Pickering helpfully adds that “human impersonation” is at the heart of what has come to be regarded as the main task of actors in (mainstream) Western ‘theatre’ (2005:69). However, if one compares all possibilities demonstrated by archaic and traditional theatre forms, human impersonation only represents a relatively small part of it.

Secondly, how can the spectators’ role be defined? Reversing Pickering’s definition it could be said that spectators witness ‘actors appear as somebody other than themselves’. Many scholars agree that spectators are at the centre of

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62 In the literature actors and performers are understood in very different ways. This study, however, adopts Harrison’s view that the distinction between actors and performers lies in the much broader range of skills and artistic pursuits connected with the performer (Harrison 1998:193).
the theatrical event and therefore of theatre itself (Balme 2010:34). The inherent relationship between performers and spectators is of importance for theatre. This was, for example, demonstrated when Jerzy Grotowski searched for the true essence of theatre by removing everything that is superfluous. Theatre, for him, is “what takes place between spectator and actor” everything else is “supplementary – perhaps necessary, but supplementary (Grotowski 1976:32-3).

Some of the most important aspects of a role in a theatre may be that people who go there as spectators know beforehand: firstly, how the labour in the theatre is divided; secondly, what they are expected to and what they can expect and, thirdly, theatre-going provides them with a place on either side of the footlights (Hogg and Vaughan 2011). The division of labour, the expectations and the position within a group are culturally specific and enacted in specific ways the world over.

Performers and spectators have been defined above. Those definitions are, however, insufficient to decide which roles Contact’s long-term users have taken in Memories of the Rain. We need to know more about the people, the elements involved and how they join up to a theatre production to be sure about the roles its participants play. First, who is needed to produce a play in a mainstream repertory theatre? In a hypothetical scenario there are at least three people who have to collaborate to produce a text and bring it to the stage: a writer, a director and a performer. The writer supplies the text, the director the artistic vision and the performer brings text and approach together in her physical impersonation. This, however, is a purely theoretical model as in practice there are many more people needed. In a mainstream repertory production in a mid-sized theatre there are more likely to be at least ten to twenty people involved in the inception,
production, reception and day-to-day running of a play. This typically includes: a
producer or dramaturge, a director, an assistant director, a sound-, light-, stage-
and costume designer, tailors, carpenters, metal workers, prop makers, a stage
manager, a prompter, technicians, wardrobe, dressers, and so called ‘front of house
staff’. Building-based theatre companies furthermore need to employ marketers,
programmers, producers, a press officer, finance people, premises managers, IT
personnel and administrators. Each of them plays an important role in the
background of production of a plays in a theatre. In Germany, for example, it is not
unheard of that for big operatic or musical productions 200 and more people need
to work together.

Devised productions, next to mainstream repertory theatre productions,
need to be shortly considered here too. In theory there at least two people who
have to cooperate to produce a devised theatre production: a director/ facilitator
and a performer. In theatre practice it is more likely that a group of performers
collaborate with a director/ facilitator. Their roles, however, are often more
flexible than those in mainstream repertory companies. The director/ facilitator
might, for example, also be a performer or the performers might also collaborate
towards the artistic direction.

The consideration of the roles involved in the production of mainstream
repertory and devised production has brought us one step closer to evidence the
roles of Contact’s long-term users in Memories of the Rain. Some of those
conventions will be considered in the context of this production below.
4.4 Theatre conventions and long-term Users’ roles in *Memories of the Rain*

Theatre, according to Balme, “demands the imaginative collusion of spectators and performers” (2010:2). Theatre critic and translator Eric Bentley specified this relationship of the theatrical event further through a now famous formula: “A impersonates B while C looks on” (Bentley 1965:150). For a theatrical event in a mainstream repertory theatre to work, ‘A’, and ‘C’ have to take on different roles. ‘A’ needs to take the role of ‘performer/actor’ and ‘C’ that of the ‘spectator’.

The presentation of a play in a theatre is typically preceded by several rehearsals. Rehearsals are – essentially – the time in which performers train to ‘become somebody they are not’. Brewer’s Theatre dictionary defines a rehearsal as:

>a session in which the director, cast and staff of a play prepare for a performance. Usually, the first rehearsals are read-throughs in which the cast simply read aloud from the script. Entrances, exists, movements, and gestures are added next, usually by blocking. Technical rehearsals are also held for stage crew, lighting technicians... Except in rare cases of improvisation, rehearsal is now regarded as essential in the Western theatre. (Brewer and Law 1994:386)

During rehearsals performers, in collaboration with director, creative team and staff produce a performance. The fact that Contact’s long-term users took part in rehearsals alone is not in itself sufficient to assure us that they are ‘performers’. They could, for example, rehearse as ‘extras’ – “as actors with no lines, who are usually used in crowd scenes” (Harrison 1998:98). A further look into the micro processes of rehearsals is, therefore, needed.

What, then, have young people done during the rehearsal process of *Memories of the Rain*? What took place during this period which determines which role young people took during *Memories of Rain*?
In principle, Contact’s long-term users utilised the rehearsal process to prepare for the performances of *Memories of the Rain*, that is, their devised, site-specific production.

*Figure 8 Rehearsal of Memories of the Rain*

In other words young people dedicated time, energy and concentration towards a public performance. This means Contact users consciously trained for a performance which would see them ‘appear before audiences, pretending to be someone or something other than themselves’ (Pickering 2005:68). The rehearsal period was marked by a number of structures, codes and milestones which are also underlying many other theatrical performances. There are at least two main ways of producing a piece of theatre. The classic way begins with a written text and could be called ‘director-centred’. In contrast, devising a piece of theatre is a ‘performer-centred’ approach to theatre making and begins without a text. Hunt, in his book *Live Theatre* mentions seven stages necessary for a classic theatre production. Hunt’s view is of importance here, as his work goes back to an understanding of theatre which is almost exclusively text-based. In a chapter called *The Practice of Theatre* Hunt argues for the division of rehearsals into seven steps: firstly, analysis of the text; secondly, preparation; thirdly, reading text and
director's vision; fourthly blocking, fifthly, detailed repetition of scenes, sixthly, run-throughs and the final and seventh phase – the play and the audience (Hunt 1962:177-88). In recent years this text-based approach has been challenged through companies which 'devise' theatre. To devise a piece of theatre means to produce a play collaboratively (Oddey 1994; Baldwin and Bicât 2002; Fryer 2010; Parsons 2010). Devised theatre has been defined as “a mode of work in which no script – neither written play-text nor performance score – exists prior to the work's creation” (Heddon and Milling 2006:3). Parsons further specifies the term 'devising' by stating: “Devised theatre refers to the process of creative collaboration by a group of performers to generate and assemble a performance through improvisation, discussion, and rehearsal, inclusive of the resultant production” (Parsons 2010). The scripted play at the start of the rehearsal period is replaced by an idea, a hunch, an image or a narrative. Due to its collaborative and often physical nature rehearsals of devised theatre have a much more fluid, transient and open structure. They depend heavily on the ethics, preferences and visions of the people involved. However, a rough and ready structure could be defined as follows: first, idea or hunch; second, establishing working principles during rehearsals, accumulation of material, sorting and structuring material, re-structuring material, temporary fixing of order of material towards a performance, performance which will often be followed by change to the content or structure after the performance.

Firstly, ‘time’ is an essential structure for a theatrical performance to take place. Contact’s long-term users, for example, practised for several weeks prior to the performance. In contrast to text-based performances the young people had less information when they first met. For example, they did not know what or how
they would perform. However, they knew where, why, when and with whom they would be performing. Spectators, on the other hand, had to invest a few hours on the day for attending the actual performance only. Their investment in the performance in terms of preparation time is much more flexible. In regular theatre plays they typically spend less time in preparation. However, fans of musicals, for example, sometimes spend more time than the performers to follow every detail of their stars and the performance in which they appear. Secondly, spatial separation of performers spectators and is another basic feature of the process of ‘role taking’. Contact users learned to manage the process of ‘impersonation’ in rehearsal rooms which only other performers and the production team could access. Thirdly, performers’ physical appearance changed during the rehearsals. They came closer to impersonating ‘characters’ through the honing of a variety of skills. The performance skills needed for Memories of the Rain included: physical abilities, like movement and acrobatics; vocal abilities, like voice, singing and projection and also more general abilities like cooperation, concentration, memory, imagination, trust, creativity and (comic) timing.

Figure 9 Memories of the Rain: team training
Contact users improved these skills by: doing group exercises (group rope jumping and running, choric speaking); dancing and moving to different forms of music; writing texts; making partner exercises, imaginative exercises and researching the industrial history of Manchester and São Paulo.

Contact’s users have rehearsed with the aim to present a narrative for spectators. Especially in the naturalistic tradition it is regarded as important that a portrayal is close to the original. Performers often markedly changed their physical appearance during the rehearsal. All used costumes, some makeup and some also changed the colour and style of their hair. Performers also used technical means to change the appearance or abilities of their body (harnesses and cameras). Some managed to change their accent, intonation, diction and pitch of voice. The physical environment of performers changed during the rehearsal period. Whereas in the beginning there was only be a rudimentary visualisation of the mise-en-scène (or set) by the end it was quite specific and detailed. The relationship between performers-in-role, on stage, changed as they impersonate their assumed character.
It has been argued here, that within the context of Memories of the Rain long-term users have played the role of 'performers' because they changed their physical appearance, their patterns of movement or aspects of their voice. Through the use of time and training they developed skills and through their input directly influenced content and form of the theatre play. Contact's long-term users were performers. They were not acting as extras but as participative collaborators of the production.
4.5 Users’ roles in Moston D.N.A.

Which roles did Contact users play in the Moston D.N.A.? In contrast to the last part of the chapter this section concentrates on casual users. This means it focuses on young people’s actions in the former Co-op corner shop. A few of Contact’s long-term users were involved in the Moston D.N.A. Here, however, they worked as artist/facilitators. KB, for example, was the lead drama worker. BM and MC lead the film-making workshops. The performers of the theatre company Tales from the Basement, who performed in the Co-op, are also a collective of ex-CYAC members. What have young people done during the time they spent in the former Co-op corner shop? What took place during this period which could help us to determine which role young people played?

*Moston D.N.A.* is a cultural engagement and outreach project of a participatory theatre company. As an outreach project it differs from a mainstream repertory theatre production. The previous section has shown that, typically, a theatrical production consists of a number of structures, codes and milestones. However, for people who are unfamiliar with theatre conventions they represent a potential barrier. In their cultural engagement work Contact’s Creative Development Team, therefore, make ‘theatre’ accessible for young people of all backgrounds. Virtual or physical barriers are addressed and theatre, thereby, transformed. Creative Development’s projects give a high priority to the specifics of the young people they are working with. Established theatre processes are, in comparison, seen as of secondary importance. The Creative Development staff asked, for example, what young people in Moston are interested in before they set out to organise this outreach project. They worked towards finding what young people in Moston were interested in so that *D.N.A.* could draw on it. They also
asked how can the interests and talents of the young people can be honed, expanded and also be stretched? At the same time Creative Development aimed at making it possible for as many young people as possible to take part in the arts-related activities they offered.

![Image of Moston D.N.A. - street art wall]

The roles Contact’s casual users played in Moston D.N.A differ from the roles usually found in mainstream repertory theatre and also devised performances within the ‘classical paradigm’. How can this be demonstrated? Contact’s casual users were clearly not acting as spectators, because they had not entered the corner shop in order to ‘witness actors appear as somebody other than themselves’ in either text-based or devised performances. On the contrary, they were drifting in and out of the space all the time. This behaviour indicated that young people did not expect to witness a performance. Their movement was lacking a clear sense of direction and overall ‘purpose’ and is reflected in the field notes:

19-03-2009: Another ‘transient’ day. Young people floating in and out of the space regularly.

20-03-2009: I understood that the dispassionate facial expression of the young people drifting in and out of the space are a … cultural marker.
There was a coming and going during the performance [of Tales from the Basement in the evening] as well. ... a group of 3 stayed.

(Gröschel 2009 (b))

And also:

I am not sure that the way young people in Moston engage [with Moston D.N.A.] would be termed “being an audience” anywhere.

(Gröschel 2009 (b))

Figure 13 Moston D.N.A. - young people MC-ing

It has thus been established that at Moston D.N.A. Contact’s casual users did not play the role of spectators. They did not come to ‘witness actors appear as somebody other than themselves’, they drifted repeatedly in and out of the space. If Contact’s casual users did not play the role of spectators, did they act as performers? Did they invest a lot of time in the rehearsal process in order to impersonate ‘somebody they are not’, did they go through a process of physical and vocal transition, did they use costume, props and other physical means to produce an illusion or represent a narrative? All of those questions can be answered with ‘no’. At least in the sense of a mainstream repertory theatre
production within the ‘classic paradigm’ casual Contact users did not play the role of performers. If Contact's casual users did not play the role of performers or spectators, did they take part as participants within the confines of a play? As the performance of a play was only a very minor part of the overall project and the play did not offer spectators the opportunity to participate, it can be stated that Moston's young people did not take the part of participants either. It has thus been established that the young people in Moston D.N.A. were neither taking the roles of performers, spectators nor were they participants in a play.

Which roles, then, did Contact's casual users play? It is difficult to characterise these roles because they blur the distinctions between known roles and they cannot be fully described with known terminology and role patterns. The roles young people played can only be sketched here, because they are emerging. The nature of the activities of the young people has yet to be defined. I have provisionally named them: ‘happeners’, ‘in-betweeners’ and ‘more-than-oners’.

How can Contact's causal users' roles be made tangible in other ways? One way of doing so is to explore ideas developed in the field of performance art, and field notes, to get closer to an understanding of the nature of what young people in Moston did.

What is a ‘happener’? A happener is somebody who happens to be in a space where something happens. The term is loosely connected with the idea of a ‘happening’. The term ‘happening’ is connected with its inventor Allan Kaprow and his art practices in the late 1950s and 1960s (Kaprow, Lebel et al. 1966; Kaprow and Kelley 2003). Kaprow’s arguably most well-known work of art is 18 Happenings in 6 Parts which was performed at the Reuben Gallery in New York in 1959 (Kennedy 2003:568). Although intended differently, thereafter the term
‘happening’ stood, for many, for a “theatrical performance in which there is no script and things just happen” and to which “little or no planning, control or purpose” had been applied (Kirby 1965:9). In the context of this study, a ‘happening’ refers to Contact’s cultural engagement strategy and also to young people who ‘happen to be’ in the corner shop.

Creative Development staff contacted young people who had attended Contact workshops in the area in the previous year before Moston D.N.A started. However, many of the young people who ended up in the shop often did not plan to be there. Some heard the loud music on their way from school, others were brought along by their friends and a few were accompanied by their parents. Once the ‘happeners’ were inside the corner shop, they often looked around for a while, joined friends in one arts activity, saw others do something else and got interested and tried out it themselves. As ‘cultural engagement’ was the main focus of the project it was considered a success when young people stayed for more than a few minutes. When they actually engaged with an art activity was almost seen as a bonus.

O., the ... photographer, said that it is an achievement to engage those kinds of young people for ten seconds, let alone 10 minutes. “Tales from the
basement managed for 20-30 minutes. So they were good in that sense. (Gröschel 2009 (b))

What, then, is an ‘in-between’? ‘In-betweeners’ are young people whose activities locate them as being ‘in-between’ the roles of spectator, participant and performer. Being ‘in-between’ means to show some characteristics of one role and of another, too. Some young people, for example, loved to work the turntables as a DJ without any prior experiences. DJ Dub Phizix encouraged them in doing so. In this way, some young people took the role of ‘performer’. However, after they had done some activity they took a more amorphous role located between spectator and participant.

Figure 15 Moston D.N.A. - young people MC-ing

Some, for example, milled around the shop without observing others or showing an interest in any other art form. In this way they were still ‘spectators’ since they could hear what other young people did on the turntables or see what others were doing. However, since they showed no signs of interest in what others were doing they became a general ‘participant’ in the overall project. Some young people observed others very carefully who practised street art, MC-ing or DJ-ing. They took the role of the ‘spectator’. However, after those ‘spectators’ had observed
other young people some tried to get closer to other young people who had been actively involved or to the facilitators. By doing so they took a more ambiguous role which might be located somewhere between ‘performer’ and ‘participant’, in other words they were showing the signs of ‘in-betweeners’. 

And what, finally, is a ‘more-than-oner’? ‘More-than-ones’ are young people who displayed signs of patterns of more than one role. They might have performed intensely or repeatedly in more than one art form and then observed the activities of others very carefully and over a longer period of time. There were, for example, some young people who came back time and again and stayed for unusually long times. One of them acted as a very tenacious DJ one day. The next day he came back before the project had even opened its doors.

Today, one of the very engaged DJ’s from yesterday was waiting at the door when Danny [Fahey] came [to open up the shop]. For somebody who has in all probability quit school, been in and out of Youth Offending Teams and had a lot of contact with the police this is actually very good. In ‘normal terms’ hardly anybody would notice. Here such small signs are picked up. Today he brought his baby and his girlfriend. He ... said after he had spent the entire day, start to finish, at the project that he wants to continue doing films. He wants to send his films to film festivals... this is astonishing. Many of those [young people] who wandered in and out of the space today have an incredibly hard life.  

(Gröschel 2009 (b))
This is the behaviour of a ‘more-than-oner’. This young person not only engaged in one art form (Dj-ing) for an entire day and he came back the next day and developed plans to engage for the longer term in another art form (film making). He also brought along his family and together they observed other young people engaging in other art forms.

4.6 Evaluation of participant observation and visual methods

Second day in Moston [20.03.2009] I adjusted to ‘their ways’ and moved away from my own ‘middle class’-ideas of audiences/ events. I discovered that I am in the moment the biggest stumbling block for my research as I see everything around me through ... my own values/ expectations. They prevent me from seeing what is actually going on without comparing it with my own expectations. (Gröschel 2009 (b))

Participant observation represented a challenge to this study. This is because participant observers either need to be experienced observers to get the best out of the method or they most know (or have access to) the phenomenon they are observing prior to the observation. Both were for a variety of reasons not the case in this study. My theatrical background limited the application of participant observation to a theatrical outreach project. I was only able to look for what I
knew, and I was focussed on signs or patterns of ‘audiences’ appearing. As I have a
classic theatre background I was looking for phenomena which I knew belong to
the ‘classic paradigm’. Little did I realise that outreach projects precisely avoid
such phenomena in order to make the ‘theatre’ accessible for people who would
not normally go there. It is for this reason that I was looking for classic structures,
milestones and phenomena in an outreach project. Little wonder that there was
hardly anything to be found.

In contrast, visual observation is independent from my own theatre
background and horizon. Photos indexically record a version of reality. It is a
constructed version of reality, however, every researcher is, in the words of
Margaret Mead able to re-analyse them again and again.
It is for this reason that visual methods were more valuable for this case study
than participant observation.

**Conclusion**

The first case study in this chapter has shown that CYAC’s *Memories of the Rain*
largely conforms to the ‘classic paradigm’. The frames determining the
performance are comparable with those of ‘traditional theatre going’. Audiences
assemble at a certain place at a certain time and watch theatrical events unfold for
a pre-determined period of time in a designated space. *Memories of the Rain*,
however, can be argued to be located on the fringes of the ‘classic paradigm’. This
site-specific piece of theatre took place in warehouse of a museum and was
performed by young people under the direction of an internationally re-known
theatre company. Most conventional theatrical practises were followed during the
performance.
In Moston-D.N.A. the ‘classic paradigm’ is breaking down. The young people still assemble at one specific place. However, the starting times of the ‘performances’ cannot be clearly marked any longer. For audiences used to plays in mainstream repertory theatre it is also unclear which events need to be followed, where they are happening and for long they might last. It is also questionable who the performers and the spectators are. The young people of Moston who frequented D.N. A. can be argued to be both, performers and theatre users at the same time. Their roles were hardly delineated, they were performers, spectators and participants at the same time. Transitions between the roles are often gradual and in some cases instantaneous. Performances can happen anywhere within the shop, at any time or none at all. In Lehmann’s understanding (Lehmann 2006) the sum of those features mark a departure from an Aristotelian dramaturgy, the ‘happenings’ could be argued to be of a ‘post-dramatic’ character.

It has been shown in this chapter that in Contact’s work the ‘classic paradigm’ is breaking down. This ‘break down’, characterised by a decrease in importance of the main elements of the ‘classic paradigm’. This can be traced through Contact’s performed work as well as through its outreach projects. The practices of the people attending Contact depart more and more from the norms and standards of other mainstream repertory theatres. The reduced influence of the ‘classic paradigm’ in the work of Contact produces a space which makes it possible for Contact’s casual users to re-negotiate some of the traditional theatre roles and practices. Instead of just being ‘performers’ or ‘spectators’ young people at Moston D.N.A., for example, need to work out what the options are available to them and how they intend to make use of them from moment to moment. Casual users sounded out and subsequently owned this participatory space through their
activities. The choices available through those activities render commonplace
distinctions of ‘performers’ and ‘spectators’ obsolete.

During Moston D.N.A., this study hit upon its, in Hughes’ terms, regressive
moment as the expectations failed to materialise. This ‘block’ forced a questioning
of assumptions I was working under and to struggle towards new meaning for
basic terms of the investigation:

In case of the D.N.A. project in Moston young people are really first
participants before they become audiences in the traditional sense. I am
not sure the way young people in Moston engage would be termed “being
an audience” anywhere [else]. However, arguably, they are participants and
audiences in their own way. Often for hours. Doing [art activities]
themselves and being there, ‘witnessing’ at the same time what others are
doing. This is not planned. It happens almost by accident. All those parallel
activities create fluent boundaries between audiences and participants.

(Gröschel 2009 (b))

This chapter has looked at users’ roles in two case studies: in CYAC’s Memories of
the Rain and an outreach project called Moston D.N.A. It has been shown that the
roles of young people in Memories of the Rain mainly conform to the ‘classic
paradigm’. Young people's roles in Moston D.N.A., however, demonstrated that the
practices of Contact’s users depart from the classic paradigm. The following
chapter continues to look at the roles of Contact’s long-term users. It is based on a
number of individual interviews and a group interview. After two productions
have been investigated in this chapter the following chapter looks at long-term
users’ Contact ‘careers’. Their involvement in specific productions, therefore,
features less importantly than the experiences they have made through playing a
variety of roles over a number of years.
5 Chapter 5 - Theatre users as Communities

[I] remembered looking around and thinking it looked cool [Contact]. It was more a feeling. A sort of intuition that this was the sort of place that was on the same level that I was wanting to be at. It catered for all the things that I was interested in. It just seemed a lot more accepting, inviting, and accessible ... I felt like there was a life here which was outside of the performances that happened here ... I felt there was a community. Maybe I am projecting that retrospectively because there is a community of artists that I became a part of and I am still part of. But I think that even from the start I felt like there was a life here and it was more than going to any other theatre where you might go and have a coffee in the foyer. [It was] partly the fact that there were art exhibitions happening here as well. All of that contributed to that feeling. (BMe 2011)

Networks of relationships are important. Networks have particular shapes and characteristics, such as hierarchy or density, for example. And individuals, of course occupy particular positions within these networks – at the margins, say, or as the bridge between two cliques. Although we often think of creativity as an individual attribute that a person possesses to a greater or lesser degree ... creativity is very much a social phenomenon and that creativity is in many ways produced by particular types of social structures. Moreover, particular positions and roles within those structures are necessary for creativity to flourish. Creative individuals are embedded within specific network contexts so that creativity itself, rather than being an individual personality characteristic is, instead, a collective phenomenon. (Giuffre 2009:1)

The previous chapter has dealt with long-term users’ practices in two Contact productions. It showed that the ‘classic paradigm’ is breaking down in Contact’s work and that some users take on a variety of roles. Young people at Contact re-negotiate and re-adjust their roles and positions continually. This chapter
extends the discussion of the previous chapter by examining another way in which Contact fosters practices that depart from the ‘classic paradigm’, by creating Contact communities. This chapter continues to revolve around Contact’s long-term users; and does three things: firstly, it identifies Contact’s long-term users as ‘communities of practice’; secondly, it interrogates their roles over a longer period of time; and, thirdly, it shows that young people’s roles within Contact change with time. It is argued here that through the people who frequent Contact, and through their work, an ‘atmosphere’ or ‘environment’ is created. It enables young people to try out different roles over a longer period of time. This ‘environment’ is important in several respects. At one end of the spectrum, it is attracting young people into Contact who might have had little connection to it so far. At the other end of the spectrum, it is creating a supportive community and supporting the work of emerging artists. A very rich and fertile ground emerges between those two poles. The middle ground can, perhaps, be characterised by a ‘mood’, or an ethos, or vibe, which encourages participation in the arts in general.

This chapter argues that at least one group of those who go through Contact’s door are a functioning community: its long-term users. To describe a group of people as a community is important, because the context is participatory theatre. It is claimed that, if theatre is practiced in a participative way, one outcome might be that groups of users will form communities and make it possible for its members to assert themselves in a variety of roles. Helped by long-term connections with Contact, some young people become artists, creative practitioners, workshop leaders, cultural ambassadors, or take up a range of other roles. In this way, this chapter contributes to the aim of the thesis: ‘doing’ theatre in a participative space changes the relations of theatre users fundamentally. It
influences the way long-term users navigate and negotiate their roles within this theatre in a twenty-first century context. A participative theatre like Contact offers different ways of participation; it influences roles and experiences, results and processes involved in theatre making and also the way users relate to one another.

Eleven individual interviews of long-term Contact users have been used as basis for this investigation. Six of the respondents were young women and six young men.

5.1 ‘Contact Careers’

Although young people can design their individual pathway through Contact’s programmes a typical long-term users’ careers path exists. Many young people start their ‘careers’ at CYAC, Contact’s Young Actors Company. After they have completed three terms at CYAC many become apprentices (also called ‘third man’) in workshops. ‘Third men’ are shadowing the workshop leader’s assistant and support the work of the workshop leader. Young people then go on to become workshop leader’s assistants and, later, workshop leaders themselves. After they have grown more mature in outlook and character, some young people go on to become young creative leaders. This means that in cooperation with other young leaders they design, plan and deliver cultural programmes. These programmes are often targeted at young leaders’ own communities, and administratively supported by Contact. After young leaders have gained a taste of working independently some are invited to co-direct performances. This is especially the case when Contact wants to showcase young people’s work at its biennial international

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63 For a reflection on power relations in interviews please refer to section: Evaluation of extended interviews.
festival, Contacting the World. At that stage long-term users often become part-time employees at Contact. These positions support young people on their way to becoming artists. Contact is often the first base from which they work independently on their own projects. Here they are able to access the infrastructure which supports their artistic projects. Through paid work young people are also guaranteed an income which helps them to stand on their own feet economically. A typical ‘Contact career’ would therefore, be comprised of taking up roles of an: actor (CYAC), apprentice, workshop assistant, workshop leader, young leader, employee and young artist. From the long-term Contact users which were interviewed the paths of the ES, BM, NG, NN, BS and LE would fit this description. This journey typically takes between three to six years. Many of these young and emerging artists first leave Contact and then come back after these formative years. This ‘general career path’ offers considerable variations. There are, for example, some long-term users, MJ is one of them, who have started at Monday Drop.⁶⁴ Together with Media Drop⁶⁵ and Technique⁶⁶ this is one of Contact’s starter programmes. For some young people these programmes represent an informal opportunity to try out new styles and ideas or to work in a theatre. On the other hand, very few young people have gone the way of BM. He started to work at Contact as a host and box office assistant and used his employment deliberately to get involved in all the other programmes Contact has to offer. Other young people, like MS, have also ‘come in’ via specialist programmes such as Freestyle Mondays before he joined CYAC and went on to

⁶⁴ See: http://contactmcr.com/projects/its-your-turn/monday-drop/
⁶⁵ See: http://contactmcr.com/projects/its-your-turn/media-drop/
⁶⁶ See: http://contactmcr.com/projects/its-your-turn/technique/
become a successful director and poet. Others, again, like AG were invited to assist productions or a workshop leader before taking up other roles within the organisation.

It can be seen here that Contact offers opportunities which enable young people to take up different roles and grow into emerging artists of many kinds. Contact, however, is an informal space for learning. Learning here is designed to take place on a project-to-project basis and to fit around young people’s other commitments. Classes and modules are replaced by programmes, projects and performances which are changing over time. It is, for example, possible to take time out and come back later. As young people often come from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds their personal circumstances are often characterised by different priorities and obligations.

5.2 Community

The term ‘community’ is a basic feature of how sociologists conceptualise society. As all concepts that have been pursued over a long period of time the term has been subject to considerable re-interpretations. In 1984 Abercrombie states that:

The term community is one of the most elusive in sociology and is by now largely without specific meaning. (Abercrombie, Hill et al. 1984: 44-5)

Boudon and Bourricaud, in their 1992 Critical Dictionary of Sociology, devote more space to the term and provide a short genealogy of the term from Aristotle and Plato to Lazarsfeld and Merton. They cite Shihl’s view that three elements are necessary to constitute a ‘community:’

There must be first a network of interpersonal interactions showing resilience and plasticity. There must be also some ‘sacred ties’ which may
be the object of symbolic identifications. Finally, the group must fit in
smoothly into the society at large in which it is enveloped.

(Boudon, Bourricaud et al. 1992: 77-6)

Boudon and Bourricaud stress the tensions between Tönnies’ ideas of the
‘warmth’ of the primary group and the ‘icy waters of selfish motives’ proposed for
the relations between individual and the community in Marx’s Communist
Manifesto (Marx, Engels et al. 2002 [1967]).

Interestingly, sociology, since its inception by its founding fathers, seems to
have treated the term community as a given. It is periodically questioned (see for
example: Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998) and returns thereafter. As the term
community is a constant in sociological thinking, social change and its effect on the
community are, instead, often the foreground. How social change influences
communities often takes a prominent place in sociological discourse. Considerably
less energy, or so it seems, has been devoted to questioning and conceptualising
what the concept of community actually means at any given time and in specific
geographical and cultural circumstances.

In his seminal work Culture and Society 1780 – 1950 (1982 [1963]), literary
scholar Raymond Williams combines sociological, cultural and dramatic thinking
to investigate the emergence, constitution and disintegration of communities. For
Williams ‘culture’ was very much seen as an antidote to the disintegration forces in
the developing industrial age. It built on ‘knowns’ and on ‘common denominators’
in thinking and feeling structures between groups of people. For performance
artist Tim Etchells (Forced Entertainment) the relation between the individual and
the group is, in essence, a negotiation of ‘place’ within society. He stresses that the

67 See a later section of this chapter for Tönnies’ views on ‘Gemeinschaft’ and ‘Gesellschaft’.
emerging ‘temporary communities’ within a performing arts context are partial and provisional.

The group itself ... is always as much a fraught and necessary question, a longing and a problem, as it is a kind of certainty.  

(Etchells in: Brine, Keidan et al. 2007:26)

It can be seen from the above that the term community changes its meaning in different contexts. On which meaning of community, then, is this section based? What is meant when the term community is used here? Even at a cursory glance of the literature there are four meanings of the term ‘community’.

Firstly, the father of most modern sociological views on community is Ferdinand Tönnies (Tönnies and Harris 2001 [1887]). Many of today’s researchers are going back to his ideas or, indeed, setting themselves apart from them. Most well-known is his typology of ‘Gemeinschaft’ and ‘Gesellschaft’.

(Tönnies and Harris 2001 [1887]) To the former he ascribes a geographical connectedness – the relationships that exist within a close-knit community. To the latter, he ascribes the wider geographical distribution of communities. For Tönnies, a ‘Gesellschaft’ is characterised by a replacement of geographical relations with contractual and individual relations between people and groups of people. Tönnies refers to communities, in the sense of ‘Gemeinschaft,’ as groups of people who live together in a geographical area. The relationships between those people are characterised by support, cooperation and ‘warmth’.

Secondly, in the field of theatre and performance, the term community is generally understood as referring to educational drama and its sub-field of Theatre-in-Education (TIE) (Jackson 1993; Thompson 2003; Nicholson 2005). Here, communities are widely understood as groups of people to whom something
is being done, normally a drama-related activity. Communities are involved in the process of making drama as well as in the wider learning processes. However, applied drama, as a western cultural practice in the context of applied theatre is often rather foreign to the communities in question. It is to the credit of those often non-western communities who engage in TIE that they manage to incorporate forms of applied theatre into their everyday lives.

Thirdly, Victor Turner’s idea of ‘communitas’ (Turner 1974) tends to be used in the literature of anthropology, performance and community. Turner understood ‘communitas’ as an extension of the term community, as the: “(re)formation of affectual relationships with co-liminars” (St. John 2008: 7). In this way, the term ‘communitas’, describes the way in which people experience a sensation as akin to ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi 1990; 1996; 1997) in a variety of drama-related settings. In other words, Turner uses ‘communitas’ to refer to a “modality of social interrelatedness” (Turner 1974: 231).

Fourthly, more recently another connotation of community has developed. It refers to virtual or distributed communities (Morningstar 1990; Rheingold 1993). Those communities occur mostly in mediatised environments such as the internet, but sometimes television audiences are also conceptualised as distributed communities (Ang 1996; Barker and Brooks 1998; Barker and Mathijs 2008).

It may be striking that the connotation which seems to best map onto the way users function in a theatre/performance environment comes from the area of learning. Lave/ Wenger’s concept of ‘communities of practice’ describes the conditions and ways which can be most closely associated with communities in theatres. For Wenger ‘communities of practice’ are “groups of people who share a
concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact [relatively] regularly” (Wenger 2006). Wenger argues that communities of practice share three common characteristics: the domain, the community and the practice of learning (ibid). Learning in the context of this section refers to an activity which McDermott understands at its most basic level as a relationship between people. McDermott defines learning as follows:

Learning is traditionally measured as on the assumption that it is a possession of individuals that can be found inside their heads... [Here, on the other hand] learning is [seen as existing] in the conditions that bring people together and organise a point of contact that allows for particular pieces of information to take on relevance, there is not learning, and there is little memory. Learning does not belong to individual persons, but to the various conversations of which they are part of. [my stress] (McDermott in Murphy 1999:16)

Therefore, learning in this way is ubiquitous; it takes place everywhere. Humans need to learn to survive – physically, economically and also culturally. They use learning to develop their personal and professional activities, their passions and their spare time activities too. When applied to their cultural practices humans implicitly ask: How can I derive more out of this activity? How can I enjoy it more? How can I relate to this activity in ways which make it worth my time? How can I behave in ways which possibly transform how I relate to cultural products or practices in which I am engaging? These concerns can be said to be relevant to users at Contact.

Communities, communitas and communities of practice are inclusive concepts. They are interrelated and overlap on many occasions. Spectators, for example, are mostly presence or face-to-face spectators. In the most recent works
of contemporary artists, however, spectators are sometimes distributed and virtual. Spectators can, on occasion, share communitas. Some spectators may even be residing in the same geographical area and therefore fulfil one of Tönnies critical characteristics. Last but not least, communities engaged in Theatre-in-Education might, on occasion, become communities of practice in a Western style, too. For this study, communities of practice map onto practices of people in the live world and, in particular, to cultural practices in the theatre.

In his 1998 book *Communities of Practice*, Wenger states that in regard to community membership that:

> When we are with a community of practice of which we are a full member, we are in familiar territory. We can handle ourselves competently. We experience competence and we are recognised as competent. We know how to engage with others. We understand why they do what they do because we understand the enterprise to which participants are accountable. Moreover, we share the resources they use to communicate and go about their activities. These dimensions of competence ... become dimensions of identity. (Wenger 1998: 152)

Furthermore, Wenger argues that membership in communities of practice is bound up with participation and reification. There are, in general, three dimensions which define communities of practice: participation, membership and boundaries. These dimensions are discussed here as important for the self-organisation and self-understanding of Contact’s long-term users as ‘artists’. Each dimension implicitly indicates who is more likely to have experiences of an ‘insider’ or an ‘outsider’ within this specific cultural field. In other words, it regulates who practices legitimate forms of peripheral participation.

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68 See also the discussions on National Theatre’s plans to stream its productions in the Guardian newspaper.
Wenger’s theory, one should note, is a theory of learning. Past theories of learning started out by firstly looking at processes of learning in apprenticeships. Lave and Wenger’s book on ‘situated learning’ (1991) shifted concepts of learning from apprenticeships to situated learning. Situated learning, in turn, generated thoughts on ‘communities of practice’ – Wenger identified these as one of the central ideas of situated approaches to learning.

One of the central ideas of communities of practice is that people in everyday life often come together in groups in order to carry out activities. Those groups can be seen as different from the formal structures in which they take place (Barton and Tusting 2005: 5). In these circumstances learning is freed from the notion that learning is something done by the individual in a private chamber. The activities of groups of people coming together in this way are, according to Wenger, characterised by three factors: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. Mutual engagement refers to interaction of members with each other; joint enterprise indicates that the group have a joint endeavour; and a shared repertoire implies that a repertoire of resources of language, styles and routines are used by group members. All three features are used to express their identities as members of the group:

Situated learning then means engagement in a community of practice, and a participation in communities of practice becomes the fundamental process of learning. (Barton and Tusting 2005: 2)

Up to now community studies have mostly been practised through the act of ascribing the term to different groups of people. Rarely have sociologists or researchers from other fields approached the ‘object’ of their studies and discussed their ideas with them. That is to say, cultural theorists have rarely spoken with
community members about their own realisation of the concept of the community to which those community members feel they belong. This has led to a prioritisation of abstract and theoretical communities instead of specific and diverse communities in academic discourse. At the same time, it has also led to a priority for the ‘understanding’ rather than the ‘practice’ of different communities. In the field of Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies specific groups of audiences have only occasionally been theorised. One exception in recent years has been Hayes (Hayes 2002; 2006 (a)), who investigated the audiences of Blackpool’s Grand Theatre, Bolton’s Octagon and Keswick’s Theatre by the Lake.

Considering the on-going discourse about communities, this study is concentrating mainly on geographically based communities. Distributed and virtual communities, however, are integrated wherever applicable. The plural of ‘communities’ is important here as it marks a shift from a rather abstract meta-concept of community to describing specific groups of people in a unique set of circumstances.

The term ‘communities’ is, in the light of the above discussion and in the context of this chapter, used rather questioningly here. It is utilised with an awareness that it refers to several specific sub-groups or communities within the overall group of Contact users. The understanding of the term community as a generic term ascribing either geographical or contractual relations is of less importance here. The study of theatre users’ experiences has, in a way, moved beyond such dichotomies. Geographical and distributed communities mix frequently among Contact’s long-term users. What is more, Contact has not only passively embraced virtual or distributed communities, but has also made the development of virtual communities one of its core values in its Globally Digital
strand of work. The Digital Duets performed on 4th June, 2011 are one example. The performance was preceded by two workshops of four hours each. A dancer in New York, called Future, and a dance troupe from Manchester, called Shockarellas, worked together in a virtual realm to choreograph the performance. This cooperation was made possible through the technical cooperation between Contact and the New York-based telepresence and culture company, Culture Hub. From a technical point of view the rehearsal was in large parts spent finding ways of working together in a virtual realm. Artistically, the cooperation was used to create a dance routine in which dancers on both sides of the Atlantic could perform and which could be appreciated by users in Contact’s auditorium. Their work culminated when the dancers in New York and Manchester were simultaneously appearing on the same stage at Contact. During the performance of Digital Duets, the Manchester dancers were physically present and the dancer from New York was dancing with them virtually on a screen. This simultaneity or co-presence of geographically bound and distant artists for the benefit of local users encapsulates both the fragmentation and the complexity of (well-worn) concepts developed in an ‘analogue age’ which are challenged in a ‘digital age’. In Contact’s work, therefore, new meanings and new forms of communities (artistic/creative communities) are emerging. Contact’s long-term users, among its other participants and collaborators, are very much in the forefront of this new strand of work on the ‘digital frontier’. Through their ‘being-in-the-world’ (Heidegger 1962)

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69 “Globally Digital: We will use new technology in all of our art and communication, ensuring that anything we produce has local national and international reach the moment it is created.”

70 The workshops took place on the evenings of 2nd and 3rd June 2011 on Contact’s main stage, Space 01, from 5pm to 9pm. Because of the technical apparatus involved, the dancers were able to rehearse the entire time in the performance space.
the participants in the theatrical event represent the world while it is being re-formed and further developed.

Generally speaking, the relationship between Contact’s users and its visiting artists can be said to be unconventional. They often build up close relationships and form communities of practice and support.

5.3 Extended Interviews

Thirteen extended qualitative interviews of individual long-term users and a group of long-term users have been conducted between January 2009 and April 2011. The interview participants were selected based on their long-term relationship to Contact. The young people have then been approached individually or as a group (Cultural Leaders). All long-term users who were approached made themselves available for an interview at some point. All but one user had previously been members of CYAC and subsequently taken on several other roles within Contact. Through their activities at Contact all of them became young artists. Most were performers, one a director, one a dancer, one a comedian, one a fine artist and one had become a performance poet. Almost all interview partners were in the 25 to 35 year-old age group. One long-term user was younger than 25 and two were older than 35 at the time when the interviews took place. Seven young people were white; three from an ethnic background – two of whom had emigrated from Asia. At least two young people were from a working class background. Most users had finished college and five young people possessed a university degree or were working towards getting one. One young man had graduated from a prestigious university in the UK with a first-class degree.
The following section will discuss individual interviews in more detail. Fourteen individual, qualitative interviews were conducted for this investigation. The first interview took place in the spring of 2009, the last in April 2011. A number of different long-term Contact users were approached directly and over a period of time. Those who could make themselves available were interviewed shortly thereafter. Two interviews were conducted via Skype since this long-term Contact user resided at the time in South America. One interview was carried out in Cardiff. Two instrumental figures in the development of Contact since 1999, Wyllie Longmore and John McGrath, were interviewed, too. Longmore was the chair of the Contact’s board. Under his leadership Contact’s board initiated and oversaw the transition from the Contact Theatre, the repertory company to Contact, the participatory theatre. In the process John McGrath became Contact’s first artistic director and was in post between 1999 and 2008.

Interviews were, on average, one hour and forty-five minutes long. The longest was close to three hours, the shortest little over an hour. All interviews except one were audio-recorded and field notes were taken. The audio files of all interviews were transcribed and analysed. The themes in each interview were idiosyncratic and also highly personal.

An inductive, grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) was taken in the analysis of the transcripts and field notes allowing the emergence of categories and themes from the data and the development of theory. Categories were refined and coding reviewed throughout the process. The format of the interview varied considerably over the length of the interview period. The first interviews were conducted in a formal ‘sit-down and talk’

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71 Both interviews were conducted with the same person.
modality. The later ones, however, were usually carried out in two parts. The first part of the interview was conducted using a ‘walking’ approach. At the start of the interview the interviewee would choose five places in and around Contact which were personally meaningful. The interviewee would then accompany the interviewer to those spots and converse with the interviewer on the way. In each place the interviewee narrated the importance of this particular place using his or her personal experiences and memories. The interviewer, in turn, took on the role of a ‘critical friend’ and sounding board in this first part of the journey. The walk-about-phase of the later interviews would normally lead to places like the stage on Contact’s Space 1, the lower and upper foyers, the dressing rooms, Space 3 or the bar. However, surprising places such as the decking area outside the Contact Lounge or the passage way between Contact and the university building next door, where also chosen, too. The second part of the interview took on the more traditional ‘sit-down and talk’-format. It could be observed that in a number of cases it is not necessarily the ‘obvious’ or more prominent spaces which long-term Contact users have a close relationship to. More often than not more functional or also spaces hidden from public view like the wings in Space 1, the entrance and exit areas in Space 2 or the dressing rooms in Space 1 and 2 or in front of the makeup mirrors in the dressing room took on special meaning and importance for long-term users.

The most prominent themes emerging from the individual interviews are: ‘belonging’, ‘artistic and personal development’ and ‘patchwork’. A section will now be dedicated to each of them.

Adolescence is defined as the transitional period between childhood and adulthood (Coleman and Hendry 1999; Coleman 2000; Gullotta, Markstrom-Adams
et al. 2000). The search for a sense of self identity is an important part of this journey. Young people are searching to find out who they are and who they want to be, it is a time of questioning, doubting, fearing, wondering, and setting lifelong values. Finding answers or alternative choices is of great importance at this particular stage of a young person’s development. At Contact, many young people, especially its long-term users, repeatedly connect and disconnect with the organisation during this time. Some specific aspects of growing into adulthood in the twenty-first century within a theatre are discussed later on.

The question of belonging (to Contact as well as to communities of practice) is closely connected with adolescents’ search for identity. ‘Having friends because of Contact’ and a feeling of ‘belonging’ to Contact or a ‘Contact family’, often from very early on, was expressed in interviews by several long-term users. A young black person said:

When I came to Contact, when I walked into the building, I felt like I was at home. I felt really comfortable ... The biggest thing for me was the fact that the audience was predominantly black [and] nearly all young people. I’d never seen that before. This made me want to do performance. When I went to see Little Sweet Thing I was very aware of being in an audience like I hadn’t been in before. That was exciting, the fact that people were making noise ... Didn’t think that you were allowed to do that in the theatre ... Apart from on a school trip, I’d never seen an audience that was predominantly made up of young people. In that cast there was one white person on stage. That’s a big shift. The energy as well. That’s the main thing. It’s like going to a concert where you want to pick up the atmosphere as well as watching the thing on stage. It was the audience that was saying it was ok to do that (even though some of the ushers were telling people to be quiet). Obviously not everyone wants to be on that vibe. (NN 2010)
One young person, an immigrant from Asia, expressed his feeling of 'belonging' in the following way:

I studied English at College. One time a project manager came to my class and told us that they were making a play about people from other countries. The first time I was inspired to become an actor was when I watched *Titanic*. When the woman mentioned the play he was really excited. I was the only person in my classroom who wanted to do it. I encouraged the others to do it too. The whole class had to do it. We came to Contact. It was a week-long project and we did a show on the Friday. That moment was so good. I enjoyed being on stage and working with people. I learned a lot. It helped me to learn the language too. I had to communicate, had to improvise. The play didn’t have any language in it ... It was just movement, images, and sounds. There was some rapping in different languages ... After that I loved Contact. I felt welcome when I came in ... I really enjoyed it. I was an outsider. But didn’t feel like an outsider at Contact. I felt like I was already part of it. [When I came to Contact] I wanted to do more acting, wanted to go to Hollywood. That was my ambition. This changed over the years. That’s what Contact does to you. It takes you on different paths. It shows you different things. After that I was really keen to come back to Contact. (BM 2010)

An emerging artist from the Midlands reflected on her first encounter:

[The Contact building] felt quite warm and exciting. I remember thinking that this could be a place for her me ... because it felt quite easy, informal, and young. It felt like it was not a traditional 'learn to act properly' place. It felt like she could find a way to be herself [here]. (LE 2010)

Those statements reflect that young people experience 'belonging' in very different ways. For NN, a young black person, black people on stage and other young people in the auditorium made her feel 'at home'; for BM, a young Asian person, Contact was a step on his way to becoming a Hollywood actor (this, at least, was the role he hoped Contact would help him to become); and for LE, a young white person,
‘belonging’ expressed itself in the way in which Contact made her feel welcome and offered alternative ways of learning about theatre. Those initial experiences and the long-term bonds they often engender also reflect positively on Contact’s intense efforts to make sure that the theatre feels welcoming and that its programmes and performances respond to young people’s needs.

Another way of feeling ‘belonging’, which came up in the interviews again and again, is that of making friends at Contact.

One young person said:

My main friend base is people I have met at Contact. (NG 2010)

Another young person mentioned:

I feel like I might have made life-long friends at Contact. This is because they are so positive about me. They are lovely people, people that I love and care about. They are people who give you the time of day. (MJ 2010)

Yet another young person stressed that:

[Contact] has just given me more friends in Manchester ... friends who have very different but also crossing-over perspectives than my own on life. Or just very different backgrounds. (ES 2009)

And another young person again said:

Most of my friends are now from Contact. If I need help with something I can come and ask someone. (BM 2010)

It is, however, not only the search for an identity that brings young people through Contact’s door. Other organisations support young people as effectively. It is Contact’s participatory intertwining of artistic activities with a keen eye on personal development in their theatre work with young people which represents a special feature of this organisation. Young people become more confident (in a
personal capacity as well as artists) as a result of receiving recognition for cooperating with other young people in all aspects of ‘doing theatre’. The activities involved in devising a production differ from playing a role in an already scripted play in more traditional youth theatres (Baldwin and Bicât 2002; Heddon and Milling 2006; Barton 2008; Mermikides and Smart 2010; Parsons 2010).

Therefore, different ways of thinking about theatre often challenge young people and also exposes them to different ways of ‘doing theatre’, to different art forms and to unconventional and youthful forms of presentation. One of Contact’s long-terms users refers to the developmental aspects of being involved with in this way:

> The audition call came for *Spoken Like a True*, [they were] looking for female poets to be part of a four-to-five day-long process with a performance at the end working with American artists. I auditioned for that, got on that. It was such a transformational process. It really gave me a boost to decide that was what I wanted to do and that was what I enjoyed. Had never felt so at home and nervous, but at home … Just doing that performance and the encouragement I got afterwards was fantastic.  

  (NN 2010)

Another young person spoke about ways in which her activities at this theatre made her apprehend that the two art forms she had practised for many years, thinking they were separate, were in fact one form:

> [At Contact] I realised that [Fine] art and theatre didn’t need to be separate and that I was actually doing them both together anyway.  

  (LE 2010)

One long-term user talked about how Contact influenced his work directly and made him expand his (artistic) horizons:

> Another thing that helped me develop was being around different art forms and seeing the writers at Contact. The poetry I am writing now has changed. I used to end poems normally, with rhyming couplets … Got to
Contact and developed a different flow. I started writing things off the top of my head. I started doing performance poetry and spoken word. Now I have the whole spectrum.  

(BS 2010)

Another young person realised that he wants to express his gratitude for what he had received at Contact by passing it on to the next generation of young people:

It sounds like a really big thing to say but Contact saved my life. When I was younger I was into drugs and was a bit of a tearaway. Theatre gave me a direction. It’s the reason I am where I am now ... Within reason, I would do anything Contact asked me to do ... They have given me so much. I owe so much to this building and to the ethic of Contact ... I owe it to the spirit of Contact, to the same hand that fed me. Now I have food, it should be a rotating thing. I just want to share what has been shared with me ... In CYAC you worked with professional companies and that really gave me my ethic for wanting to work. I can’t say enough how much Contact changed my life. I believe that it’s the reason I am here now making a living from it. If I hadn’t had Contact, and John’s support particularly... I can’t big up John enough either. He was an amazing influence in my life. [He] show[ed me] that things are achievable. John was very open in the way he thought. If you wanted to do something, he would equip you with the tools to do that. If he couldn’t, he would point you in the direction of somebody that could. Just the encouragement. Contact are like a second family. I have always felt very supported. Contact has saved my life or at least kept me out of jail. I don’t know what else I would have been doing because there is nothing else I get a buzz out of the way I do from doing theatre. Contact has allowed me to do that.  

(NG 2010)

Many of Contact’s long-term users, exposed to working in many different art forms, see themselves as the proverbial ‘Jack of all trades master of none’. This is a theme occurring regularly in the interviews. The multidisciplinary character of their
work leaves some young people with difficulties defining what they do and to which art form they feel an allegiance.

One research participant solved this problem in a creative way. Asked how he sees himself he answered creatively:

It is hard to describe what I do. I describe myself as ‘theatrician’ [a term which he invented].

(NG 2010)

Another research participant has the same issue:

I find it hard to describe my occupation. I do many things.

(ES in EN)

Yet another research participant expresses it this way:

I have a complex identity. I am many things: a story teller and a writer.

(NN 2010)

The individual interviews of long-term Contact users captured a typical phase in the life of young people: their adolescence. It was recognised that the patterns and experience of growing up have changed radically in the last thirty years for most young people in the UK (Coleman 2000: 230-242). The transition into adulthood has become much longer and is accompanied by increased complexity, uncertainty and risk. In the past traditional routes into adulthood often led quickly to a secure job. Today's young people, however, have to deal with an increased amount of uncertainties. According to one school of thinking, this process could be seen as a series of transitions in and out of independence across a longer period of time (Coleman and Hendry 1999: 8). Many young people have, therefore, to rely to an unprecedented degree on their own initiative, their personal circumstances, and family and other support networks to meet their needs. At the same time, the

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72 Such relatively secure professional and financial circumstances would in the past also often lead to more stable emotional engagements from a relatively early age.
impact of external structures of support in the lives of young people has diminished (Chisholm and Hurrelmann 1995: 129-158).

Many young people’s wish to attain autonomy and independence has remained constant, but nowadays they have to find the means to do so largely by themselves. The development of a personal identity is one way of acquiring a sense of autonomy and independence. Increasingly, young people look outside their family and school structures to explore and form identities. Often young people rely on the support of their peers to do so (Chisholm and Hurrelmann 1995: 149; Hughes and Wilson 2004: 59). Therefore independent networks of peers, which could also be termed ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger 1998), have become important for young people growing up. Which ‘place’ they choose is important to many young people as are the people in whom they invest their trust. For many this ‘attachment’ to a ‘place’ and a group of people (a community) is a decision which has wide-ranging consequences. Due to the lack of external support structures young people are seeking a place of their own, a home from home or a second family, or even a group of people they would like to belong to in the future.

The sense of ‘a community’ among long-term users is influenced by the needs of young people in their developmental stages. Questions of identity, belonging, values, as well as role models, change, risk and direction take up centre stage for them. Many of these issues are shared by young people at Contact. The tendency to address those issues in a cultural way makes it easier to identify with each other and to develop a sense of belonging to a community of practice.

The concept of a Contact community must be seen as a flexible one as different communities within Contact contribute differently at different times. In other words, individuals or groups are involved in a number of roles in the
continuous making and re-making of the Contact community. For Contact’s long-term users, periods of intense and close engagement are often followed by times in which they work elsewhere, come into the building occasionally, or may only keep in touch with Contact.

Interviews have confirmed the impression that young people are looking for a safe ‘space’ in which they can ‘practice’ growing up, relating to others, taking responsibility, growing personally, socially and artistically/creatively. The impression that Contact is experienced early on as ‘their space’ is often of the utmost importance to young people. This means they can ‘come as themselves’ as ‘they are’ and do not have to make a conscious effort to ‘fit in’. It is fine for young people to just ‘be’ in this space as Wylie Longmore originally intended. The former Contact Chair even stresses that this should be one of the main aims of Contact, to allow young people ‘to be’ in their building. The Contact building is intended to promote a sense of belonging among young people. Many architectural features, like colours, shapes, daylight and a general sense of openness support this claim. The needs of young people are setting the tone here. The building works and operates around what it believes to be best for the development and progress of their long-term users. This sense of ‘belonging’ to a place, to a group of other people and also to practices taking place in this space give young people a sense of belong to a ‘community of practice’ or to several communities of practice operating out of Contact.

Very early on the data suggested a very close relationship between personal, social and artistic development of young people. Some interviewees stressed that changes in one of these areas would instigate changes in one or more of the other two. An interviewee, for example, noted that his increased artistic
confidence helped him to develop into a more self-confident young person in his private and social life too. At least in one instance, the opposite was also true. Missed opportunities 'haunt' an artist and make him regret a decision he took ten years ago. This young person came to Contact 'knowing' who he was. He also knew what he wanted from his time at Contact. He felt, he said, rather sure of himself at the time of first getting to know Contact. He was aware of what he had done artistically and thought he 'knew' how Contact could help him to become an artist in his own right. His self-assuredness led him to decide that he would seek employment opportunities at Contact rather than joining the young actor's company (CYAC). He believed at the time that he had already 'done that' (youth theatre) in his home town. There was, he felt, no need to do it again in Manchester.

Interestingly, this view has changed with time. After approximately ten years his decision not to join CYAC has led to feelings of loss to the now established artist:

I have massive regrets now [over not joining CYAC]. (BMe 2011)

It can be seen that this long-term Contact user equated the work of CYAC with other youth theatres in the UK. After he had realised the difference between the two, his decision left him with misgivings. The artist is now beyond the age limit of CYAC. After this door closed for him he realised he had forsaken opportunities for professional and artistic growth through his own decision. It is interesting to note that he, as a young person, was unable to appreciate fully the difference between a youth theatre and CYAC's participative arts practice. The more mature artist, however, is valuing it very highly indeed. It can thus be seen that the personal, social and artistic development of young people at Contact are inextricably linked.

Secondly, importance is found in the fact that young people are looking for a place to belong and develop personally, socially and artistically. Belonging to a
group other than their neighbourhood, family or peer group is important to them. This is, in all likelihood, is one of the first fundamental decisions young people take independently and according to their own preferences. Young people, as argued above, are looking for people who share some of their interests and who should be as much like themselves as possible. Young people want to be accepted as they are and they want to know that the place they have chosen will offer them the opportunity to change and grow, and continue to be accepted now and in the future.

It becomes important that young people entering Contact have the impression:

This is a place I could like. (BMe 2011)

This impression makes a difference for young people as it increases the likelihood of meeting young people similar to themselves, who generally share this view and are likely to be interested in similar fields and in cooperation.

By reviewing the individual interviews it became clear that the initial expectations which led young people to become members of CYAC, or in one case Contact, were hardly fulfilled in the way in which they had envisaged it initially. A number of long-term Contact users came to the organisation to become a “Hollywood actor” (BM) or as a step on the way to secure a “role in Hollyoaks and an agent” (LE 2010). However, due to the influence of creative and participative practice at Contact, those expectations were soon dismantled or lost credibility for the young people. One interviewee said:

73 Young people are modelling themselves ‘towards’ a specific community in order to belong to that community. Once they belong to that community, though, a need arises to differentiate themselves, or to be ‘visible’ among other community members. Therefore, there are always at least some basic tendencies with regard to communities: one is to belong (and to share qualities and characteristics) and the other is to differentiate (or to be visible) against the background of other members of the same community.
This is what Contact does to you. It changes you. (BM 2010)

The initial aims of the young people upon entering Contact were in the majority of cases formed by the ‘classic paradigm’. With experiences of those unorthodox creative practices and approaches to theatre, the horizon of almost all Contact’s long-term users broadened beyond recognition:

Seeing *Somewhere the Shadow* blew my mind ... It made me realise how malleable theatre is. Theatre is what you make it. (MS 2011)

Young people who come to Contact initially often wish to become actors and actresses. When they stay at Contact they are, however, invariably transformed into creative practitioners during their time there. Upon entering Contact the ideal for many had often been to ‘fit in’ and to ‘play a role’ within established, and mostly mainstream, cultural frameworks. However, once young people had been with Contact for a longer time their ambitions changed. Most became workshop leaders and artists in their own right. Additionally, some engaged in creative consulting or were mentoring other young people and emerging artists. Some of Contact’s long-term users worked as ‘cultural ambassadors’ for Contact in a variety of ways. All of Contact’s long-term users, however, had developed beyond the confines of the ‘classic paradigm’. They critically engaged with their preferred art form in parallel with an engagement with other art forms. Instead of trying to fit in, Contact’s long-term users can be seen to be keen in their artistic practices to engage with contemporary artistic practices (form and content) by questioning conventions. This often led young people to formulate their own questions in relation to artistic formats. The transition from mere executors of artistic choices of others to becoming critical practitioners, who make independent artistic choices in wide-ranging ways, has been one of the key findings in this study. Over time young
people become increasingly confident and assured about their artistic choices. Those acquired competencies also establish them as members of a ‘community of practice’ of artists working in and out of Contact.

Wenger argues that membership in communities of practice is defined by participation and reification. Communities of practice are not reified in themselves. They do not necessarily carry labels or other reified markers. The identification of participants is therefore formed through participation as well as reification. Wenger remarks:

In this context, our membership constitutes our identity, not just through reified markers of membership but more fundamentally through the forms of competence that it entails. Identity in this sense is an experience and a display of competence [my stress] that requires neither an explicit self-image nor self-identification with an ostensible community.

(Wenger 1998:152)

Membership in a community of practice, therefore, translates into an identity as a form of competence: ‘in practice, we know who we are by what is familiar, understandable, usable, negotiable (Wenger 1998:153).

It can, therefore, be argued that Contact’s long-term users are developing a sense of their identity by participating in the communities of practice at Contact. This identity is developed in a space that interlinks individual, social and artistic development of individuals and groups of young people. Young people gain an insight into who they are as creatives by finding their “own voice” (MS 2011) this enables them to feel more assured about their identity as individuals and also as social beings outside of Contact.

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74 Please also refer to the citation of BMc at the beginning of this chapter.
In the context of Contact it becomes apparent that young people are developing in holistic ways. If one part of the human system is changing, the other parts of the same system are also very likely to change. This can, arguably, be interpreted as a thread. In this case the answer to such a thread is likely to be answered with an increased adversity to risk. The message here is that everything must stay as it is and influences of any kinds must be minimised. On the other hand, the holistic or systemic nature of human beings can also be understood as an opportunity to grow. As everything is seen as being in flux\textsuperscript{75}, change can be welcomed and embraced. The message in this case is that all humans (and all things alive) are in a process of development. Therefore, new and also unusual stages/ processes might be used to stimulate change of the entire human system. The latter attitude is, generally, encouraged by Contact’s long-term users who have been through CYAC or the Contact-experience more generally.

However, the network of staff, users and long-term users that forms Contact as a whole is at the same time also a ‘member’ of a community or several communities of practice. Contact is one player or, arguably, one member within a complex field of cultural exchanges between theatres and other cultural organisations in the UK. It is a ‘springboard organisation’ which acts for many of its users as a first step into the professional world. This does not only apply to Contact’s long-term users – who arguably profit the most from its existence – but also other groups like Contact staff; those who wish to perform there; casual users who are influenced by Contact’s ethos; staff who take up positions in other organisations; and also users who go on to work in other (often cultural) institutions. Contact continually develops and changes its way of operation and its

\textsuperscript{75} See also the concept of ‘Panta Rhei’ in Barnes (1982:65) and Peters (1967:178).
practice to adapt to changes in the social, economic and cultural context. It is, in the words of one interviewee, “always becoming” (BMe 2011). By influencing the thinking and practice of many people, Contact also influences the wide theatre ecology in the UK and in those international countries it connects with through Contacting the World.

As Contact is continually developing it comes into contact with people who, in turn, influence the way theatre is practiced in other theatres in the UK and beyond. This can be exemplified by the positions a number of former staff have taken up since moving on from Contact. For example, staff members have gone on to work for the Royal Court Theatre in London, the Lowry in Salford, the Royal Exchange in Manchester and for the Australian Youth Arts organisation in Melbourne. One former Contact staff runs the education department of the Library Theatre another went on to work at the Lowry. Some of Contact’s young artists, too, have found new challenges in other arts organisations, drama schools or other countries. For example, two artists have in recent years gone on to attend well-known drama schools and one artist has gone on to work in Brazil. There are a number of former Contact members who have taken up positions as artistic directors and/or chief operating officers in other arts organisations, for example at The Mac in Birmingham, The Corby Cube and The National Theatre of Wales. The skills, practices and ethics of those who pass through Contact have, in the end, a bearing on cultural industry in the UK as a whole.

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76 I am unable to conclude if Contact’s ‘impact’ is measurable. What can be said, however, is that the way Contact operates influences young people who use it for a longer period of time. In the words of a long-term Contact user, people “take a bit of jam and bring it back to their communities.” Those communities can be communities of personal living, working or learning.
5.4 **Evaluation of extended interviews**

This section is going to reflect on the use of extended interviews in the research process. Firstly, the advantages of interviews will be detailed in comparison to their contribution to this study. Secondly, based on an argument by John Locke (1979), the inequalities underlying the interviewer-interviewee (insider-outsider) relationship will be reflected upon. Thirdly, it is outlined why interviews are useful for this study.

First, what are the advantages of using interviews? Interviews have the potential to provide information about people’s thoughts, feelings and behaviour from their own perspective (Kenney 2009:36). The face-to-face interaction enables researchers to change and adjust her approach. Interviews can provide research material with depth, nuance and complexity as well as rich contextual information. Especially in emerging methods, feminist research and action research it is seen as important to give some control over the research process to the participants whenever possible. In this way, researchers can frame their interaction with the respondent as collaboration (ibid.). It is increasingly seen as a part of an interview that researchers also respond to questions of participants.

Interviews have, of course, some drawbacks too. As Bernard points out, all humans forget and memories decays exponentially with time (Bernard, Killworth et al. 1984:507). His overview of the literature on informant accuracy led him to argue that: “on average, about half of what informants reported is probably incorrect in some ways” (Bernard, Killworth et al. 1984:503). Some respondents may misrepresent or withhold information. Cultural differences may also lead to respondents interpreting questions in different ways. Respondents may unwittingly distort what happened as both the emotional state during the reported
incident and during the interview may affect what and how much they remember (Patton 1990). The current study had to deal with those problems. However, it was found that, despite the drawbacks, extended qualitative interviews provide the best first-hand account available. They are, by their nature, better and 'arguably' more accurate than ‘third-party’ information. They also provide a valuable link between the macro-narrative of the organisation and product- or programme specific accounts.

John Locke's *Essay Concerning the Human Understanding* (1979; 2004) contributed to the creation of a new map of language, knowledge and discourse that mapped social inequality. He separated the imprecise, shifting and ambiguous use of words associated with rhetoric, poetry and the like, with rational reflections on individual experience and the articulation of thought in ‘plain,’ serious language. His linguistic concept was then mapped onto the social world:

Gentlemen, who had the leisure and training to reflect on their use of language, exemplified ideal speech. Women, the poor, labourers, merchants, cooks, lovers and rural folk, on the other hand, spoke in the imprecise ways that Locke condemned; such persons were largely incapable of developing greater rationality and linguistic precision by virtue of their lives. (Briggs 2001:912-3)

His ideas have been powerful and over time:

Locke's discursive model of the modern subject – autonomous, disinterested, and rational – became the model of the scientist (see Shapin 1994), the citizen (see Macpherson 1962), and the public sphere (see Habermas 1989)... Locke's ideology of language and politics naturalized both the emergent social and political structures of modernity and the idea that the degree to which individuals approximate the ideal of the modern subject naturally locates them within the relations of inequality.

(Briggs 2001:913)
Instead of expecting ‘rational’ reflections on individual experience and the articulation of thought in ‘plain, serious language’ this study dealt with imprecise, shifting and ambiguous terms and concepts. They are the twenty-first century equivalents of the ‘everyman’ or Locke’s “women, the poor, labourers, merchants, cooks”.

Interviews in the twenty-first century have to work with the ‘power differential’ created by historic inequalities, especially those created by different forms of language usage and rationality. It is not the wish of the researcher to legitimate and prolong such inequality. However, it has to be acknowledged that, since the work is being created within an institutional context, it will bear at least some of the hallmarks of historical inequalities nonetheless.

Methods such as extended, creative qualitative interviews are seen here as a ‘negotiated text’ in which the researcher is visible and part of the interaction he seeks to study, as well as the research potentially influencing the interaction (Denzin and Lincoln 2008 (a):144). It is almost impossible to lift the results of interviews out of the context in which they were gathered and claim them as objective data with no strings attached (ibid.). Schwandt remarks that:

> It has become increasingly common in qualitative studies to view the interview as a form of discourse between two or more speakers or as a linguistic event in which the meanings of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent. (1997:79)

Extended, creative qualitative interviews are a good means for the researcher to enter into reflective conversation with his respondents. They are essential as one way of exploring the inter-connectedness between individual live stories and Contact’s ‘story’ on one side, and the researcher on the other side. One could argue
that young people, Contact and the researcher have, in the course of the investigation, become part of each other's narratives. The influence they have on each other is also a part of the extended horizon of this investigation. In addition, extended interviews imply the need for a level of critical reflexivity on part of the researcher as qualitative research can be seen as a way of ‘offering a textured feeling’ for the research material provided (Dudrah 2001:62-3).

Dudrah, drawing on Bhavanani and Harraway, argues that we historicise our identities through elaborate storytelling all the time (Dudrah 2001:63). In order to offer a balanced account of social and cultural phenomena, he argues that the channels of information need to be reflected by keeping in mind the wider research agenda and the topics which arise from the interviews:

Extended interviews also reveal the fluid nature of identities, especially as they are told and constructed through the interview process. Interviews are not a simple unfolding of the “the real”, rather they involve elements of autobiographical memory, self-narrations, and co-production of identities by the researcher and the respondents, themselves forms of representation and identity construction. (Dudrah 2001:63)

It is important that the interviews are specific according to the positions of the young people and the researcher within Contact’s culture and also independent of it. Within this study extended interviews have been a practical tool to render some of the braided threads weaving in and out of Contact’s story audible. Extended interviews then made it possible to bring parts of the emerging narratives to the fore and ‘map’ them. Extended interviews, especially their creative and ‘walking variation’ are useful means to make ‘lived history’ recognisable which has so far been subsumed under the Contact name.
Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that Contact’s long-term users are a functioning and diverse community. Their composition reflects a wide cross section of urban youths in the north-west of England in the twenty-first century. In fact, their practices constitute them, as a community. This can be seen since their shared cultural practices and interests are acting as a bond. Such links could also be viewed as replacing other more formal and reified membership markers.

It could be argued that calling Contact’s long-term users a community is pushing the boundaries in our understanding of what constitutes ‘community’. If such an informal and ever changing group of young people can be called a community so, arguably, can many others. This only adds to the fact that participative practices are creating new and emerging communities. The importance of such participative practices in reference to theatre has yet to be established more fully by research. Contact’s long-term users share a number of interests and passions; however, they equally differ in their preferences, cultural backgrounds, beliefs and strength. This is to say, this group is far from being an ‘ideal’ group which others should aspire to emulate. In fact, Contact’s long-term users are probably unique in a way in which every other group of young people in the UK would also be unique in its composition. Nonetheless, the existence of this community and their shared practices show that it is possible to establish new cultural practices which are more inclusive and more accessible to diverse groups of the UK population.

It has been argued that three main markers indicate that this community has its own identity: their mutuality, their accountability and their repertoire. Some would say that these three specific markers are representative of groups of
people who share a day-to-day contact with each other on a professional basis. However, the quality of relationships that Contact’s long-term users said they experienced was equal, if not more life-changing, than some relationships found in the commercial or professional worlds. Young people who use Contact’s offer—their way of ‘doing’ theatre—for a long time arguably develop a number of skills and abilities matching those or even going beyond those displayed by their peers. Drama educator Jeremy Hunt neatly sums up the tasks involved in ‘devising’ theatre:

’[T]hey – we – were learning how to dream up ideas; and, having dreamt them up, how to put them in operation. The process involved research, thinking, a use of the collective imagination, analysis, organisation, making objects, the acquiring of technical skills to make it all work’. (Hunt 1976:78)

It has to be stressed, though, that the work described above does not necessarily mean to challenge any of the existing paradigms of production and reception of theatre. Practices involving challenging certainties in the theatre include all of the above and also require a degree of reflection and innovation that goes well beyond what is conventional. Contact’s long-term users not only learn to do their craft as it has been practiced for many years but they also learn to incorporate the unexpected. This can include the use of other art forms or practices into the production or reception process in the theatre; creative thinking in a holistic way or, in recent developments, the inclusion of wider social concerns into the conception, making and distribution of theatre. One such example is the combination of ecology and the performing arts in more direct ways.77

77 BMe, an artist who emerged from Contact’s long-term users, for example, was funded to tour England, Scotland and Wales on a bicycle exploring the environment. As a result of this tour an on-going project was initiated which explores links between art and activism.
The current chapter has found evidence that Contact acts as a transformative space that allows long-term users to develop into ‘communities of practice’. Those communities of practice, in turn, encourage users to relate to other users and artists in different ways. As there is a lack of formal membership markers, or outward signs of users’ belonging to this community, they develop an ethos and practices that signify their membership. Their way of thinking about and practicing theatre become markers by which they are able to identify with and relate to each other. By trying out a variety of roles, users’ practices become bolder, more varied and experimental with time. To belong to this ‘community of practice’ means that young people can find a home-from-home and a group that provides them with a supportive environment, as well as peers who users can look up to and on whom they can model themselves.

It has thus been established that long-term users assume a number of different roles at Contact. The fact that their roles change differentiates Contact’s long-term users from audiences in mainstream repertory theatres. Audiences are likely to come back to the theatre playing the same ‘role’ again and again. The division of labour between performers and audiences in mainstream repertory theatres is, more or less, fixed. There is little space for change.

This chapter has concentrated on Contact’s long-term users. It drew on interviews as a method and used a number of personal stories to argue that Contact’s long-term users operate, in effect, as communities. By doing so, it could ascertain that people in close-knit communities, who are playing a range of different roles, are one of the pillars of this participatory theatre. The following two chapters will depart from the focus on long-term users and concentrate on casual users, instead.
The following chapter will interrogate casual users’ experiences of a travelling production: Two Gents Productions’ *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and CYAC’s *People in Glass Cases Shouldn’t Throw Stones* multiple creative methods will make it possible to render some casual users’ experiences visible.
Chapter 6 – Researching Casual Users through Creative Methods

Whilst parts of what we perceive comes through our senses from the object before us, another part (and it may be the larger part) always comes from our own head. (James in Wilson and Stevenson 2006:4)

The impact of the work of participatory theatre cannot be distilled to the messages, story contents or words, but must be opened up to the sustenance of sensation and the subsequent fuelling of inquiry. (Thompson 2009:125)

The previous two chapters have dealt with Contact’s long-term users – those who use its services over extended periods of time – and examined their roles. They found that the practices of Contact’s users depart from the ‘classic paradigm’. The previous chapter has shown that long-term users often form communities of practice which make it possible for them to take on a variety of different roles. In contrast, the following two chapters look at causal users – those who draw on Contact’s services less often than their long-term counterparts – and their experiences of performances and Contact itself. So far, this investigation has mainly used established research methods. At this point, however, new and innovative methods – creative workshops and Walking Fieldwork – will be introduced to investigate casual users’ experiences. The discussion of research methods will, therefore, be placed at the beginning of this chapter, and not, as in previous chapters at the end. It is especially hoped that the use of innovative methods will prove to be suited to the investigation of experiences of young people and users with ethnically diverse backgrounds, outside of the ‘classic paradigm’.
This thesis seeks to investigate the roles and experiences of Contact’s users and the methods used to research them. It argues that Contact’s users do not fit the ‘classic paradigm’ and that, therefore, new methods are needed to investigate their practices. The current chapter continues to engage with this question through an interrogation of casual users’ experiences of two productions. The first is a visiting production of Shakespeare’s *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, which was performed on Contact’s main stage, Space 1, by Two Gents Productions. The second, *People in Glass Cases Shouldn’t Throw Stones*, is a devised CYAC production, which took place at the Manchester Museum. This chapter researches casual users with creative methods and looks beyond ‘meaning-making’ processes. It also recognises ‘non-hermeneutic’ experiential processes which are part and parcel of the performance although they might take place outside of the time in which spectators and performers meet. This specific focus allows concentration on areas which have in the past often been side-lined or neglected. The investigation of casual users’ experiences and their contribution to Contact’s overall atmosphere allows some neglected factors to become, at least partly, discernible.

**What are experiences?**

In 1999 Pine and Gilmore wrote *The Experience Economy* (Pine and Gilmore) in which they argue that businesses must orchestrate memorable events for their customers, and that memory itself becomes the product – the “experience”. In their view economic offerings of the industry have changed from commodities to goods, then to services, and, in the latest development, to experiences. In their opinion, experiences are as distinct from services as services are from goods (Pine and Gilmore 1999:3). The authors illustrate their point by comparing the value of
coffee beans as a ‘commodity’, a ‘product’, a ‘service’ and, finally, as an ‘experience’.

Farmers receive, according to Pine, little more than one to two cents per cup for the ‘commodity’ of coffee beans. After a manufacturer has ground, packaged and sold coffee beans customers have to pay between five and twenty five cents for a cup. By now the coffee has been turned into ‘goods’. When ground coffee beans are brewed in a corner coffee shop and sold there this ‘service’ costs customers around fifty cents per cup. However,

[s]erve the same coffee in a five-star restaurant or espresso bar, where ordering, creation and consumption of the cup embodies a heightened ambience or sense of theatre, and consumers gladly pay anywhere from $2 to $5 for each cup. (Pine and Gilmore 1999:1)

Pine and Gilmore make an economic argument. They claim that the recognition of ‘experiences’ is a new source of (economic) value. They illustrate their point further by pointing out changes which go along with economic offerings:

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<th>Commodities</th>
<th>Goods</th>
<th>Services</th>
<th>Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Agrarian</td>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Experience</td>
</tr>
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<td>Extract</td>
<td>Make</td>
<td>Deliver</td>
<td>Stage</td>
</tr>
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<td>Fungible</td>
<td>Tangible</td>
<td>Intangible</td>
<td>Memorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key attribute</td>
<td>Natural</td>
<td>Standardized</td>
<td>Customized</td>
<td>Personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method of Supply</td>
<td>Stored in bulk</td>
<td>Inventoried after production</td>
<td>Delivered on demand</td>
<td>Revealed over a duration</td>
</tr>
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<td>Trader</td>
<td>Manufacturer</td>
<td>Provider</td>
<td>Stager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Market</td>
<td>User</td>
<td>Client</td>
<td>Guest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor of demand</td>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>Features</td>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>Sensations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Pine and Gilmore’s Changes in economic offerings
Pine and Gilmore’s argument is of importance for this study as they show that the value of an experience is realised by the fact that it is ‘memorable’. Traditionally, the concentration on the meaning making processes in audience research has left out experiences which are by necessity connected with ‘affect, sensation, perception, knowledge and feelings’.

Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary defines experiences as: “passing through any event or course of events by which one is affected” and also as “anything received by the mind, as sensation, perception, or knowledge (Schwarz and Kirkpatrick 1983:443). Collins Concise Dictionary adds to that by defining experience as: “a particular incident, feeling etc. that a person has undergone” (Hanks 1989:435). Experiences can thereby be seen as being closely connected with affect, sensation, perception, knowledge and feeling. It is clear to see that it represents a challenge to research experiences of casual users who are a large and diverse group. In the past those difficulties have often been regarded as insurmountable. Authors like Thompson, Gumbrecht and Ehrenreich (Gumbrecht 2004; Ehrenreich 2008; Thompson 2009) have shown that it is essential to also pay attention to and research “what reaches us through the senses” (Thompson 2009:116).

What are the experiences of theatre performances? Experiences include affects, sensations, perceptions, knowledge and feelings which are connected to performances and also the journey to the place – often a theatre – where performances happen. Experiences can only be accessed through memory and must be ‘memorable’. One way to access casual users’ experiences is, therefore, to enquire about what they remember about the performance.
In the past, audience researchers in the theatre have often assumed that spectators talking about a performance reflect exclusively the experiences of the performance in question. There has, so far, been little research into how prior knowledge, expertise and also the ‘affective register’ influences spectators’ experiences. One could understand spectators’ expectations, pre-formed ideas, social and artistic conventions as mental and cultural ‘baggage’ and also as cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). Both memory and pre-formed frames are decisive for framing how performances can be both experienced and processed. It is argued here that those ‘frames’ which spectators bring with them to the theatre are at least as important as the theatrical event itself. It is, arguably, easier to form opinions about a performance with the help of cultural references and appropriate frameworks which help to connect the unknown with the known.

Broadly, theatre-goers are partaking in a process of which the theatrical event is just one part. Pre-formed expectations and post-performance reflection enable audiences to modulate, in McConachie’s words ‘blend,’ theatrical experiences in very specific ways.

This chapter demonstrates that casual users’ previous experiences play an essential part in preparing, shaping, experiencing and co-creating performances. Two case studies are used to support this claim. The first case study was conducted as a creative workshop with college drama students. The second case study used a new method called ‘Walking Fieldwork’. It drew on a variety of casual users in terms of their age and social backgrounds.

### 6.1 Innovative Research Methods

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78 One could argue that an event includes, first, a pre-performance-period, secondly, the performance and, thirdly, a post-performance-period. Please also compare (Sauter 1997; Sauter 2000; Sauter 2008).
**Creative workshops**

Creative workshops can be used as a method for the exploration of alternative and emerging theatre settings, which may involve complex responses and also multiple levels of experience. Due to an intense stimulation of respondents’ memories they are able to unearth complex underlying frames and systems of believe. The method has the potential to empower research participants through involving them in the research. Creative workshops are able to produce many layers of rich, contextual research material. Difficulties in applying these methods can be anticipated in mainstream theatres and also with casual users at Contact because it can be assumed that there is a relatively high entry threshold for respondents. Audiences and causal users might need assurances and encouragement before agreeing to take part in a workshop of this kind. Creative workshops are an ‘unusual’ method and many people might shy away from it thinking ‘this is not for me’. The method is especially suited to young people, people from various ethnic backgrounds, alternative user groups and people with special needs as it can produce non-verbal research material (images, video, physical representations, 3-D material).

**Walking Fieldwork**

Walking Fieldwork has the potential to empower research participants through their involvement in research process. It is an equally adequate method for researching complex and multiple levels of experience because it is intensely stimulating all human senses without prioritising one in particular. The flexibility of the method worked well with Contact’s complex off-site production in this small case study. However, more focussed trials of the method are needed.
6.2 Case Studies

The investigation of casual users’ pre- and post-performance frames draws on two case studies. One case study was conducted as a creative workshop with drama students from Loreto College, Manchester. The second case study is a longitudinal study of a site-specific performance. It was conducted using ‘Walking Fieldwork’ as a research method and drew on a variety of contributors.

6.2.1 Loreto College

The workshops with Loreto’s drama students were based on the performance of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, directed by Arne Pohlmeier. In this production two performers of African descent play nineteen characters.79 *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* was played on Contact’s main stage and in its auditorium. The college students first attended the performance at Contact. One week after the performance the workshops took place at Loreto College. The college students were seventeen to eighteen years old and in their second year of studying performing arts. Since they group was too large, the workshop had to take place on two different days.

I used Reason’s workshop method as a starting point (Reason 2006 (a); Reason 2007) and Gauntlett’s ideas to focus on the ‘how’ participants use a creative workshop to make sense of their experiences (Gauntlett 2007). The workshop had the following structure. First, the project was introduced and students played a few warm up games. Students briefly introduced themselves

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79 Pohlmeier, Denton Chikura and Tonderai Munyevu together form Two Gents Productions, the production company behind this touring production *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. 
and wrote a ‘flash biog’ about their family background. Secondly, a few exercises helped students remember their theatre visit. This involved responding to questions which were written down on flip chart paper. Thirdly, students were asked to look back at the material they had produced by reflecting on the performance in class and synthesising it. In the last section of the research session students were invited to reflect on their theatre visit, on the responses of the group and to synthesise their own material.

Finally, in the third part of the workshop, the student group began the process of analysis of the wealth of material they had produced. Initially, two working groups were formed. They looked though the research material and made notes of those moments, thoughts and recollections which were repeated across several individual work sheets. After each working group had completed their task, participants of both working groups together analysed the material they had produced. This process resulted in one final list which contains moments which carried most prominence of this theatrical event.

After the completion of the previous section students began the process of analysing and reflecting on their responses given on flip chart papers, spider diagrams and lists. Once they finished the analysis of the written material students reviewed everything they had done. They talked through their personal highlights of the performance in a facilitated discussion. When answers seemed unclear students would provide further details. It was the aim of this section to allow

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As a way of introduction students were asked to write down, first, their favourite theatrical genre/their favourite play; secondly, how many brothers and sisters they had; thirdly, if they were the first in their family to go to college and, fourthly, what their parents do for a living. The method of writing answers down worked well as it granted access to the research material right away without having to transcribe it first.
students the chance to elaborate on their thoughts or develop new arguments by reflecting on what they had written down or drawn.

Before the workshop started it was stressed that this was not a test and there were no right or wrong answers to the questions. It was also highlighted that personal opinions are very much of interest here. The full variety of thoughts and opinions existing in the class were therefore welcomed.

After the introduction and warm up phase, flip chart papers were scattered around the dance studio. Then students chose a coloured felt tip pen and responded to each of the questions posed on the flip chart papers. The flip chart papers had the following headings:  

i. What I expected  
ii. A moment I will remember  
iii. A moment which moved me  
v. A moment I particularly enjoyed  
vi. Something I would like to change  
vii. Something I heard (on/ off stage)  
viii. Something that caught my eye (on/ off stage)  
vii. Other people in the audience  
ix. Something about the dancers  
x. Something about Contact.

This production of The Two Gentlemen of Verona had a very lively, engaging and interactive character. It drew on pantomime, street theatre and on African performance traditions. The stage and the auditorium were both used like a market place. The ‘stage’ was wherever the actors went. Casual users were frequently involved and used as extras and, at times, as (silent) characters. The stage was lit in a general warm wash. Over long stretches of the performance the

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81 For a full list of questions asked, see also the appendices at the end of this chapter.
auditorium was also lit. The performers used African performance styles, street performing techniques, improvisation and interplay with spectators as their style of communication.

All nineteen roles, male and female, were played by two male performers of African descent. They used a minimal set and a total of twelve props. The performers frequently used music, they sang themselves, played a number of instruments, made casual users sing along with them and also used popular music. The latter was especially successful with younger casual users as it created a bond between young people in the auditorium and the unfolding story on stage. Shakespeare’s text, too, was used in a rather free and unconventional way. The language of the play was contemporary: youthful words were often used and the characters generally spoke in modern-day prose. Performers mostly fell back on Shakespeare’s text if a scene’s development depended on it. Two Gents Productions made the performance especially appealing to younger people by occasionally stopping the flow of complex passages and asking into the auditorium: “Did you get that?”, “Shall I explain?” or “Can we continue”? This created a relaxed mood and set up an equal status between performers and casual users which directly involved young people in the performance. It felt generally possible to contribute and be part of the performance.

The inquiry followed a three-stage structure. First, the research project was introduced to both groups in an introductory workshop in their own drama class time in their college. Students had the opportunity to ask questions. Secondly, both groups watched the performance of Two Gentleman of Verona at Contact on

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82 All roles of Two Gentleman of Verona were played by Denton Chikura and Tonderai Munyevu.

83 Some instruments were of African origin.
November 17th, 2009. Thirdly, the creative workshops with both groups were conducted seven and eight days respectively after the performance in their drama class time in their college environment. Here, the workshop groups produced the research material which is used in this research project. The preparatory and the creative workshops took place in the drama class room and the performance space / theatre at Loreto College Manchester. The workshops, therefore, had to fit into the structure of the education system in this further education institution.

Reason’s workshop methodology was used as a starting point for the workshops (2006 (a); 2007) and combined with Gauntlett’s ideas to focus on ‘how’ participants use a creative workshop to make sense of their experiences (Gauntlett 2007). What follows is an introduction of the six most important structural features of the workshop process.

The first workshop started with warm-up games, including some ice breakers and high energy games. Secondly, students did exercises which helped them remember what they thought, felt and experienced as they entered the theatre and found their seats. One task, for example, was called: “Remember finding your

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84 The performance was a touring production of Two Gents Productions, directed by Arne Pohlmeier. (www.twogentsproductions.com, last accessed: 31.08.2011) It featured two black performers, Denton Chikura and Tonderai Munyevu, who share a Mozambican background. Those two performers among them played more than fifteen characters of Two Gentleman of Verona.

85 Here I would like to acknowledge the influence of Matthew Reason’s ideas for the structuring of the workshops; especially his work on exploring experiences of young people in the theatre.

86 As the drama class room did not offer enough free space for the workshops, I was able to utilise the performance space/ theatre of the college. This space is a big, theatre-like room complete with sprung wooden floor, some lighting, a sound system, a technical control room and retractable seating for around 120 audience members. When the seating is at its full capacity there is only a very small strip of ca. 2.5 x 12m of performing space left. There are no wings or ways to enter the stage area from the side or the back. For the first creative workshop a third of the seating was retracted, which created a space of approximately 8 x 12m. This gave students enough space to move around freely and, at the same time, use the seating area for small group work, too. Some theatre lanterns lit the space during both creative workshops, the fluorescents were turned off.
chair: please enter the theatre again, find your seat and vocalise what went through your mind.” Thirdly, students were asked broad, general questions in regard to their experiences in the Contact auditorium. Flip chart papers were dotted around the performance space. Each sheet carried statements at the top and students were encouraged to respond to these at the bottom of the sheet. They could choose how they would like to do that; they could either write down a word, a phrase or a sentence or draw their response. For that purpose felt tip pens in green, blue, red and black lay next to each sheet of paper. Students were asked to contribute to each sheet in the room. It was stressed to all students at the start of the workshop that there were no right and wrong answers and that their individual responses were highly valued. The statements students were asked to respond to included:

- Something about the audience.
- Something I noticed on/off stage.
- Something I heard on/off stage.
- Something I saw on/off stage.
- What I expected

In the second workshop group students were additionally asked to respond to the following statements:

- Other audience members
- The actors
- Something about Contact

Fourthly, students were asked to individually choose one moment and flesh this moment out in as much detail as they could. For this task, each student received a
sheet of A3 paper with an outline of a spider diagram. In the middle of the diagram students would write/draw one moment they remembered well. In the branches they provided more in depth detail of ‘their moment’ including sensual experiences, thoughts, feelings and observations. Students were encouraged to be as detailed as possible. Fifthly, the students used the research material contained on the large sheets of paper to draw out topics/themes which occurred more often. For this section they would work in first small and increasingly bigger groups. After a small group had completed its task it was coupled with another small group and the process of analysing the research material was repeated. In the end the entire student group was involved in analysing the entire set of research materials produced in the workshop. Both workshop groups produced a list containing the results of their analytic activities. Sixthly, students were asked to present their findings after each phase of working to the entire group, their lecturers and myself. The presentations were audio- and video recorded, beginning from the small groups and ending with the entire group. It is, finally, important to draw attention to the fact that students were analysing their own material. In this way, they were not only participants but also co-researchers.

First Creative Workshop Group

The research material from the first workshop group was recorded on: ten sheets of A3 paper containing themes and amalgamated theme lists; twelve sheets of A3 paper with spider diagrams; ten sheets of A0 with ‘topic lists’ (something I heard/}

87 http://www.enchantedlearning.com/graphicorganizers/spider/ Accessed: 06.04.2010

88 A remark on participative research ethics: it is important to trust the work of the students, their ability to summarise correctly and amalgamate material appropriately. Their choices are valid and need to be understood as such.
saw/ noticed). In addition, parts of the group discussions and presentations were audio and video recorded, too.

The final list of the first creative workshop contains the amalgamation of all other (small group) lists. It reads: (all underlining and punctuation marks are taken from the original)

Albert!!
Props
Stage Space
Instruments/ Vocal

This is a list with four entries, three of which were underlined and one of which carries two exclamation marks. Even if we assume that the underlining was not meant to represent a stress, the exclamation mark certainly represent exactly that.

Why had the students of this group decided to stress one entry more than three others? What caused this disparity? Who is ‘Albert?’ Questions like that led later on to the realisation that a subtle process of negotiation had taken place between different casual users. One casual user, an old man, behaved in the eyes (and ears) of the students so unusually that his actions and his appearance became one of the foci of their theatre experiences. The students remarked that they could not help but notice what he did, how he looked and how he behaved. As the old man actually sat in close proximity to the Loreto College students he was closely observed by a number of students during the performance. His very presence became so familiar that students in the first workshop named him ‘Albert’. In fact, it was not the entire group simultaneously which gave him the name but a rather outspoken student came up with the idea while he was vocally mulling over his experiences of the performance. His small working group accepted his suggestion
readily and with some laughter. All subsequent working groups accepted the term and used the name, too. ‘Albert,’ according to the list drawn up by the students of the first creative workshop was the single factor which a majority of the group had noticed the most and had the strongest feelings about. The old man appeared on top of their list and this entry carried two exclamation marks. The students of the first workshop group certainly thought ‘Albert’ featured very highly on their list of occurrences, people, thoughts and experiences of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* performance.

The other three items on the student's list are props, stage space and instruments/vocal. All three are connected to stage business without actually being part of the story the actors told. It is quite remarkable that none of the four features on the amalgamated list referred to Shakespeare's play. Seen from a broader perspective this might, perhaps, be no surprise. One has to remember, after all, that the young people under consideration are all performing arts students who attended the performance as a requirement of their course. They had not chosen to see this play themselves. In an informal after talk many students mentioned that they only attended because it was a course requirement. Their expectations were low indeed: a Shakespeare play and all fifteen or so characters would be played by two African actors. “What good can that be?” summarised one student (Gröschel 2009 (c)).

A majority of students felt, however, that they really enjoyed the experience of the theatrical event. To many, the performance felt ‘relevant’ and it was ‘speaking to them’ in words, music and images they could relate to. The production had in many ways outperformed students' expectations. Some students, however, took exception to the acting techniques. Many felt insecure
about it. Was it acceptable to openly improvise in front of spectators? Can improvisation be an integral part of a theatre performance? Was it adequate to repeatedly include spectators? Was it suitable to address casual users and often directly involve them in the performance? Some students, therefore, doubted the quality of the performance and the performers. They questioned whether improvisation, interaction with the spectators and other theatrical and performative means rarely seen in Western theatres corresponded to their idea of ‘theatre’. Some of those students disapproved of the performers’ disregard for traditional theatre conventions. For example, the fact performers paid no attention to the division between stage and auditorium was perceived by many students as a distinct lack of discipline and focus. It is likely that discipline and focus would be part of the feedback students receive in response to their own acting work in college, too. It might, therefore, not be surprising that they are sensitised to those formal qualities of performing of other actors. However, even students who rejected improvisation and audience participation as legitimate means of theatrical communication enjoyed the effects of those stylistic means at times, too. In order to negotiate this contradiction one student said: “Yeah, I enjoyed it but they used it [improvisation, audience participation, African performance traditions] too often. It was too much” (Gröschel 2009 (c)).

Students revealed in the workshop that they had rarely, if ever, before experienced Shakespeare, let alone any other text-based play, in such an informal, engaging and entertaining way. The inclusion of street performing techniques, youth language, music, improvisation and audience participation in a mainstream theatre context seemed novel to most research respondents. Often students’ expectations were guided by naturalistic acting conventions and Western-style
musical performances. Their previous experiences and their resulting expectations could be visualised as a map. Naturalistic, text-based theatre performances are on one side. They are associated with formal and institutional qualities of the art world. The special qualities of the artwork (the performance) are anchored in the intrinsic values of text.89 Music, dance, singing, improvisation, in short, non-naturalistic performance elements, occupy a different section of the same map. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* took the middle ground between text-based performances and popular entertainment and utilised both styles. Many students were surprised that several performance styles could be used in one and the same performance in what they perceived to be as a ‘formal’ theatre. This illustrates that students’ perceive Contact against the backdrop of the ‘classic paradigm’. Students expected to experience ‘formal’ qualities in the theatre context and also in the performance. Contact, however, sees itself as an alternative, experimental and youthful theatre. It therefore embraces non-formal qualities in performances they invite onto their stages. It thus becomes clear that students’ pre-performance frames informed their expectations towards the experience of the theatre itself and the qualities of the play. Both, therefore, became part of the co-creation process.

Only one of the four bullet points on the final list of the first creative workshop regards casual users: ‘Albert’. Although ‘Albert’ is clearly important, it is only one of four themes overall. The other three themes are concerned with the actors’ tools and spaces. The use of props, instruments, vocals and stage space was unusual in this form to the students, too. In the first workshop group it was

89 Compare with the discussion in the introduction about the place of the realization of artistic qualities in either the text, the performance or in the concept of the art-work. See also (Dickie 1974).
assumed that students were better versed in naturalistic and musical varieties of theatre. In order to understand students’ theatre expectations more fully it was decided in the second creative workshop to ask students about their favourite play and what kind of theatre they would chose to see. In order to also gain a glimpse into their personal background students were asked in the second creative workshop if they were the first in their family to go to college and what their parents’ professions were. A majority of students were, indeed, the first ones in their family to go to college. The parents of the majority had professional jobs or were self-employed. Few parents had jobs that required academic qualifications.

The use of **props** was unusual in this production of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* as there were only 12 items, in total, on stage at any one point in time. They were all hanging on a washing line which crossed the stage from left to right. All of them were visible during the entire play. The only other piece of setting was a treasure chest which stood centre stage. All props were used over and over again, often with different functions. A shawl worn around the head or the neck, for example, would indicate a female character. The same shawl worn as a sash would transform the same actor into an army general. Props in this production were clearly used as accessories which would indicate rather than explicate the transformation of an actor into another character.

The **stage space** of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* was used in unusual ways too. The stage was entirely empty except for a treasure chest and the aforementioned 12 props hanging on a washing line which crossed the stage. Rather, the actors’ positioning on the stage or in the auditorium defined the stage. ‘Stage space’, in this sense, is a flexible concept and simply defines a physical location in which an action takes place. The mental concept of ‘a stage’, however,
moves around with the performers. Spectators in Shakespeare’s time had been familiar with having to ‘fill in’ the scene using their imagination. For Shakespeare’s contemporaries a flexible notion of a ‘stage’ was part and parcel of theatre-going. It was a common practice that a scene took place wherever the actor moved or where he said the scene took place. Some students might have experienced this practice, which is nowadays used in street theatre, for the first time. Therefore, it was may be not surprising that stage space was mentioned in the final list.

The musicality of The Two Gentlemen of Verona was enjoyed, again, by a majority of students. The love songs, mock songs, the more general, mood-setting tunes, music and also the seductive dance were clearly important for the performance. One has to remember that both performers have an African background and used African performing arts traditions in their production of The Two Gentlemen of Verona. In African popular theatre, broadly, performative narratives are often interrupted by a song or a dance in which spectators are often welcome to join (Breitinger and Sander 1986; Fiebach 1986; Hutchison and Breitinger 2000). African theatre traditions have at least partially informed the artistic concept of this production of The Two Gentlemen of Verona. The musicality was an aspect of the performance which, it could be argued, was known and unknown to the students at the same time. It was familiar to them because they knew and were familiar with Western music traditions in the theatre. As young people they are also familiar with Western traditions of popular music. Popular songs were used to the great pleasure of many young casual users. The employment of musicality in a performance, however, went against the

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90 Compare also with act three, scene one of Shakespeare’s Midsummer Night’s Dream in which Quince, Bottom and Snout decide to have an actor playing a wall with a hole through which Pyramus and Thisbe talk (Shakespeare and Griffiths 1996).
expectations of many of those UK performing arts college students. This was especially true for the lyricism of the performance; the use of popular songs; and the audience participation (in the established sense of the word); in short, the popular, eclectic, entertaining character of the performance. This accounts for why ‘instruments/vocals’ had been included in the final list of the first creative workshop group.

What might be surprising to the visiting theatre company as well as to Contact was that the story and the play text, in short the features which usually draw spectators to a theatre performance, were not mentioned in the final list of the first creative workshop group. This reflects on the findings of Reason who found that young people find the social interactions in the auditorium as least as important as the performance on stage (Reason 2010 (a)).

The fact that the actors’ craft was not mentioned by the first creative workshop group might be surprising. The actors’ craft, one could assume, would feature highly on the list of up-and-coming actors, a profession many of the students would like to go into. However, the versatility of the African actors might have been seen as ‘too different’ as to be highly regarded by the students, who are themselves accustomed to Western performing art styles. The young performing arts students highly valued structured craft and the formal expression of skills in a distinct Western performing arts tradition. Students’ focus was clearly only on Western skill sets and theatre formats. The ‘people’s actor’ skills of improvising in front of spectators, involving spectators as characters and extras, in short, using every stimuli available to performers, influenced the way in which many college drama students experienced this performance of Two Gentleman of Verona.
Second Creative Workshop

The second creative workshop only differed from the first in the following features: firstly, two questions were added which students were able to respond to. Secondly, students wrote down their personal background instead of talking about it in plenary.

After the second creative workshop I received back from the group: six A3 sheets of paper, fifteen A3 spider diagrams and nine A0 sheets of paper with themes (other people in the audience, something I noticed/heard, saw). This research material is supplemented by audio and video material which was recorded during the second creative workshop.

The final student-amalgamated list reads as follows:

- Laughing – in both groups
- Kissing
- Dancing
- Lighting
- All male

It is interesting to note that the single most important theme of the first creative workshop, ‘Albert,’ the old man, is not mentioned in the second workshop group’s final list. However, the appearance of the old man and his laughter were also mentioned in a working subgroup in the second workshop, too. The old man, although noteworthy for a small subgroup in the second workshop, does not seem to have registered as importantly as he had been for the entire first workshop group. One clear sign of a drop in significance is that the old man was only personalised in the first workshop. The second workshop group, however, did not give him a name. Albert’s appearance and his reactions remained in this workshop
on the same level with occurrences like the laughing, kissing, dancing and the fact that both actors were male and had to cross-dress.

The second creative workshop group also made a qualification in regard to two characteristics they had come up with. They highlighted the following with circles:

- Lighting – x2
- Laughing – x11

The first subgroup of the second workshop had noted the laughter of the casual users. The second subgroup, however, chose to qualify their observations about ‘laughing’ rather than quantifying them: they noted ‘audience laughing’ rather than just laughing in general. This group is specific which laughter they are referring to.

In comparison, the first subgroup probably also had, in all likelihood, the laughter of casual users in mind when they wrote “laughing.” However, this ‘laughing’ could equally refer to the laughter of actors, too. The second subgroup’s qualifications are as follows:

* ACTORS CHEESY GRIN and
* OLD MANS – HA HA + Socks.

These are clearly two variations to the same theme. However, the second subgroup is specific about expressions of the actors and the old man. Although being more specific than the first subgroup the second subgroup does not mention what the actors were grinning about or when or why the old man laughed. They were, on the other hand, not asked to identify when or why they noticed something. It is nonetheless interesting to observe that the first subgroup mentioned 'laughing' in general terms. The second subgroup, however, was more
specific as they identified ‘the audience’, ‘the actors’ and the ‘old man’ as laughing in noticeable ways.

The final list of the second creative workshop shows that five different features of the performance were noted by students:

- Laughing
- Kissing
- Dancing
- Lighting
- all male

One feature relates directly to what the casual users were doing: laughing; two relate to actors’ activities: dancing and kissing; one refers to a technical aspect of the performance: the lighting and one relates to the artistic choice of casting two male actors for all characters.91

One of the five themes dealt with the spectators, whereas all four themes deal with other features of the production. Two of four features refer to the actors’ craft and lift them up as noteworthy. However, it does not give an indication as to why the students had noticed what they had noticed. Did what they had seen become memorable because it was very well executed or, the contrary, done in a very poor manner? Both we cannot safely infer from the available research material.

What can be said, however, is that the students had mostly noticed ‘actions’ of other causal users or performers. Laughing, kissing, dancing, all refer to active embodied practices of casual users and performers. Students noticed one technical aspect, the lighting. This could be attributed to the fact that the lighting

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91 It is noticeable that the final lists of both workshop groups erased one line, which would have been another theme, by blacking it out.
in this performance could be described as minimal. There were two lighting cues: one for scenes taking place on stage and a second one for scenes in the auditorium. The lighting of this show could be described as a general ‘warm wash’ with few noticeable characteristics. In its simplicity it is rather reminiscent of the conditions of day light which were prevalent in theatres like in Shakespeare’s time.

It is further interesting to note that there is no mention of Shakespeare’s plot or any other details connected with the literary text in the second workshop group. Students knew the text well enough to follow the many role changes of the actors and keep abreast with the flow of the action on stage.

The only artistic choice which found its way into the final sheet of the second workshop group was the decision of the director to cast two male actors, who had to play all male and all female characters. As the students were not only studying the play text but also the theatre-going and acting conventions at Shakespeare’s times this is an interesting parallel. To see a male actor play a female role in the twenty first century struck the student spectators as odd and in some contexts as comical. This is, after all, is repeated every year by the ‘Dame’ in the traditional Christmas pantomime. However, the practice of casting boys as women was very common in Shakespeare’s time. In fact, during Elisabeth’s reign female characters had to be played by boys because women, by law, were forbidden to perform on a stage.92 The workshop participants were aware of those traditions and commented upon it informally. It is interesting to note that the fact

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92 The Globe Theatre’s website remarks that “in the Elizabethan theatre, therefore there were no actresses at the Globe Theatre. The acting profession was not a credible one and it was unthinkable that any woman would appear in a play. The parts of female characters were played by young boys”, [http://globe-theatre.org.uk/globe-theatre-female-roles.htm](http://globe-theatre.org.uk/globe-theatre-female-roles.htm) last accessed: 22.03.12. See also: (Weimann and Bruster 2008), (Shapiro 1977; 1994) and (Davies 1939).
that two males playing all the parts was unusual enough for the students to notice. This culminated in the phrase the “homo-kiss”. One female student remarked that the actor playing Silvia was “frighteningly believable.” A number of female and male students were mildly shocked to see a grown up man successfully adopt female ways of posture, walking, gesture, mannerisms so much so that his appearance could have even passed for a ‘woman’.

I would like to bring the final lists of both groups in close proximity to each other:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Albert!!</th>
<th>Laughing – in both groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Props</td>
<td>kissing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Space</td>
<td>Dancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruments/ Vocals</td>
<td>Lighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both lists seem to complement each other, as there is only very limited areas of overlap between them. In fact, they complement each other. Seen together they comment on a wide variety of phenomena: casual users, even a single, memorable user; actions of performers; performers’ props; performer's (stage) space; performers playing instruments and singing songs; technical aspects which puts performers in a ‘good light’ and also an artistic choice: the reduction of an entire cast to two male actors.

Both lists appear to have similar ‘shortcomings’ or omissions. They speak as loudly as the themes which were mentioned. Both lists omit Shakespeare’s narrative and their characters. His play seemed to largely go unnoticed or be a taken-for-granted. In this production Shakespeare’s text went into the background. The performers treated it, at times, flexibly, more akin to an outline. The large sections of improvisation and direct audience participation, although
mentioned in class discussions, were not part of the final sheets either. This might be due to the fact that although a majority of students could embrace actors’ professionalism some doubted their mastery of traditional Western stage craft, as they understood it. The actors, after all, had been improvising their many roles in front of the spectators. The final lists seem to be partly made up of features a theatre and drama student would be likely to notice: a stage which is unusually empty or the unusual handling and exhibition of props, the generic lighting, the all-male cast and the ‘homo kiss’. These themes reflect on what young, up-and-coming professionals would be likely to notice in a performance. This also applies to actors’ ability to play one or more instruments and to sing on stage. On the other hand, the laughing, kissing, dancing and the homo (-erotic) kiss recorded by the second workshop group could be features which any young people, not only performing arts students, might have commented upon. The production of The Two Gentlemen of Verona provided a rather rare experience of a multi-layered contemporary theatre practice which differed from student’s expectations of naturalistic, literature-based ‘drama’. The actors presented a rather emotionally touching and ‘embodied experience,’ which might arguably also have been noticed by non-performing arts students. The comments on the laughing, kissing, dancing and the homo (erotic) kiss, then, resemble the opinions of adolescents rather than those which might be specific to drama students. It is surprising, after all, that most features in the lists could have been noticed by any young person. Only the second group noticed, and felt strong enough about the artistic choice of casting two male actors to write them down. The first, more ‘professionally observant’ workshop group, however, chose not to mention any of the artistic choices of this production of The Two Gentlemen of Verona. They had singled out a casual user,
even personalised him, and commented on his behaviour and his appearance. This shows an understanding of the ‘frames’ (Goffman 1975) which govern behaviour and attire of spectators. The reflections of the students in the second creative workshop seemed to indicate that they had increasingly appropriated the Contact auditorium as ‘their space’ in which they knew what is appropriate and what is not.93 The old man in the auditorium clearly compromised the young people’s ideas of what can be considered an appropriate appearance and behaviour in a theatre. A number of young casual users increasingly made Contact’s auditorium their own. This is demonstrated by their sensitivity to and frustration with the behaviour, attire and reactions of ‘Albert’. During the performance an increasing number of students felt affirmed in their opinion that his behaviour and dress were infringing on the norms of theatre-going. Several students made polite attempts to address the situation during the on-going performance and thereby felt affirmed in their opinion that their own behaviour and appearance was appropriate and that of Albert was not. Students who huffed and puffed, shoot looks, turned towards ‘Albert’, therefore, acted in a similar fashion to grown-ups who remind more inexperienced (and often younger) audience members in mainstream repertory theatres to be quiet. The students expressed their irritation about the appearance and behaviour of the old man, who was behaving to a different set of rules. Students’ actions could be said to be aimed at making the old man re-consider his behaviour and adopt their own preferences. However, students stopped short of actively ‘stepping in’, ‘saying something’ or confronting him directly. Although the students and other younger people needed to

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93 This could be seen as young people executing their understanding of ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu 1984) or their know-how to behave and dress appropriately in the theatre.
acknowledge that the old man was not complying with their own understanding of
the rules of theatre-going, they avoided an open public confrontation during the
performance. However, students clearly had reasons to notice the old man's 'rule
breaking'. Their choice of not directly interfering in Contact's auditorium led them
to reflect on their observations in the workshops a week later.

It is interesting to observe that the experiences of the young people which
could give observers the impression that they 'own the place' in actual fact does
not correspond with their theatre going habits. Although both groups are drama
students most of whom indicated that they hardly ever went to see 'straight'
drama performances. Most of them would, however, frequent musicals and other
forms of popular musical entertainment. The frequenting of musicals and opera
houses, then, represents their cultural capital, habitus or 'cultural competence' as
audience members. Students did not find it difficult to transfer the codes of one
theatrical genre to another and develop a sense of 'ownership' in a different kind of
theatre. A number of rules are similar between different kinds of live theatre
venues. Most students are, as they conveyed their theatre-going habits early in the
workshop, familiar with the frames regulating audience behaviour in formal and
musical theatres. It could be observed that students perceived Contact as being
similar to a musical theatre venue. Live performances are offered in both theatres.
Students transferred a rather formal behaviour, which is practiced in musical
theatres, to Contact. However, Contact is an informal theatre venue. It supports
young people to 'relax' and to feel at home. Loreto College students wished to
'relax' and feel at home in the auditorium during the performance. The old man
was doing the same. The only difference is that he was doing it 'his way,' which he
knew to be in accordance with Contact's values and expected behaviour. However,
young casual users additionally brought frames of behaviour and appearance from a more formal venue with them. Due to their wish for security and ‘at-home-ness,’ felt that other casual users at Contact should adhere to these (formal) rules, too. This, then, is the conflict, a clash between formal and informal ways of appearance and behaviour. The ‘Albert’ did not conform to the expectations of the students and did not much care about the fact either. As a Contact regular he is in tune with the more relaxed rules regulating casual users’ behaviour and appearance. He, in this way, acted very much in accordance with how Contact wishes young people to appear, behave and experience their organisation. It can thus be seen that young people applied frames to their and other casual users’ behaviour, which are, in fact, neither encouraged nor regarded highly at Contact. It becomes apparent then that students’ (pre-performance) expectations with which they arrived at Contact strongly influenced the way in which they related to and also co-created the performance of The Two Gentlemen of Verona. Young people applied those imported frames (mainly from musicals and other formal theatres) to this performance and also to the appearance and behaviour of fellow casual users.

**Conclusion**

This case study has shown that the tensions between young people’s (more formal) theatre going habits, on the one hand, and their (more informal) experiences at Contact, on the other hand, inform their process of co-creation. One could say that Contact occupies a specific register of theatre. This register is often new to young people who come to Contact performances for the first time. Sometimes, the building, its interior design, its staff and its ‘atmosphere’ conspire to putting young people at ease upon arrival. However, performances are likely to
challenge the ideas of young casual users of how theatre can also be practised. Young people often use any theatrical experiences at their disposal to determine how they should appear and behave at theatres which are new to them; in this case Contact. Due to the fundamentally different nature of the ‘classic paradigm’ and a young people’s participatory theatre a mismatch between the former and the latter are likely to occur. A mismatch surfaces, for example, when young people’s ideas of how to dress and behave ‘appropriately’ differ from other casual users’ practices when both witness the same performance. In the case of ‘Albert’ young people rightfully claimed Contact’s auditorium as ‘their space’ since it is a theatre for young people. At the same time, however, they were feeling uncomfortable with the behaviour and the appearance of ‘Albert,’ who happens to be a mature casual user. However, ‘Albert’ is in this case very much in tune with Contact’s informal attitude to appearance and behaviour. By claiming ‘a right’ to set the tone in the auditorium the young people tried to impose their values, which are congruent with behaviour in formal theatres on at least one other casual user. In other words, the young people behaved as if Contact was a formal theatre venue. The much older casual user, on the other hand, behaved in a ‘relaxed’ and informal manner which is favoured by Contact’s board and management team. It is, therefore, not surprising that ‘Albert’ takes up a lot space devoted to respondents’ reflections about the performance.

The context of the performance of The Two Gentleman of Verona proved to be of, at least, equal importance to the performance itself (see also: Reason 2010 (a)).

For Loreto College students it was of importance what kind of background they had and which interests they brought to the theatrical event. To them it
mattered greatly how they are able to relate to the world of the play. Loreto students, for example, are drama students. Their lives are, in one way or another, closely connected with the theatre, its conventions, its professional ethics, its spectators, its context and last but not least, the craft of the performer. Most students at Loreto College chose this institution to either become performers or be professionally connected to the theatre in one way or another. Keeping this context in mind it may not be surprising that Loreto students noticed a lot of stage business: props, costume, acting and theatrical conventions. This might be considered ‘natural’ as this is the context in which they want to work in. What also becomes visible in their responses is that they not only studied Shakespeare’s text of *Two Gentleman of Verona*. Students also studied the conditions under which spectators were likely to have experienced Shakespeare’s performances in the late sixteenth century before seeing the performance at Contact. Prompted by such studies of historical spectators Loreto students documented their awareness of other casual users at Contact in their responses to the research questions. They, therefore, commented rather often on other casual users’ (non-) compliance with formal theatrical codes and conventions. Students also became increasingly aware of their own expectations in regard to other casual users and towards the performers, too. Interestingly, students’ expectations of conventions and the actors’ craft influenced their ability to enjoy the performance as a whole. If their concept of ‘acting’ was wide enough to incorporate a more experimental approach to working with spectators students were much more likely to appreciate this production of *Two Gentleman of Verona*. If students linked acting closely to naturalistic productions and musicals they were more likely to be disappointed. Pohlmeier's production of the *Two Gentleman of Verona* regarded popular, African
and street theatre as highly as established conventions of the ‘classic paradigm’ in Western theatre.

The responses of Loreto College students, in this way, mirrored quite precisely the expectations of the students, their ‘theatrical ideology’ (or cultural habitus) and their general degree of openness to other performative traditions. It could be argued that Loreto students’ responses were unique in the sense that they reflected a group of individuals who had a personal investment in the theatre which was of a private and also professional nature.

6.2.2 People in Glass Cases Shouldn’t Throw Stones

Why has Glass Cases been selected for this investigation? This project is typical for Contact’s work as it creatively challenges the framework of the 'classic paradigm'. It is a devised CYAC production which works with ideas and structures rarely found in mainstream repertory theatres. Similar to the reasons which have been advanced earlier for Moston D.N.A. Glass Cases has been chosen because it is an off-site production. As such it needs to find ways showcase Contact’s ethos – its ‘philosophy in practice’ outside of its own building. Contact’s theatrical off-site productions tend to re-produce its values and its ethics in unusual conditions and with different people. Outside productions, thereby, make basic principles of Contact more clearly visible than in-house productions. Looking at Glass Cases makes it possible to better gauge the range of people’s experiences in Contact’s work. People in Glass Cases Shouldn’t Throw Stones (hereafter: Glass Cases) is a Contact Young Actor’s Company’s performance. It is the second show of the year 2010, the summer performance. Glass Cases is a promenade piece performed in

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94 The promotion material for Glass Cases read: “Welcome to the Museum of the Future, where people are perfectly preserved as objects of curiosity and nothing is quite what it seems... Join the tour and
the Manchester Museum. It took place over a three-day period, totalling six performances. Performances started at either one o’clock or three o’clock in the afternoon on the Thursday, Friday and Saturday of the last weekend in August 2010. Glass Cases was devised under the direction of a creative team led by Tom Hogan (Aqueous Humour). The members of CYAC are between 15 and 25 years old. The production had a preparation period facilitated by a lead artist. She was supported by a former CYAC member who later became the assistant director of the production. After the initial rehearsal period the young people worked for three weeks to create the performance facilitated by Tom Hogan (Contact Young Actor’s Company 2010).

Glass Cases was a performance which led casual users through a ‘system’ (the Manchester Museum). During this time they met a number of characters and exhibition pieces. Casual users were asked in first scene to help find a ‘key’ which had gone missing. They had to connect the dots from one scene to the next and from what they were able to observe during the performance. Interestingly, this included not only situations that were planned and prepared but also ones which were found, such as the transitions from one performance site to the next, times of watch as the lives of the exhibits unfold in front of your very eyes…but beware, when a stone gets thrown, the glass cases are shattered and the walls between real life and fiction come tumbling down… Set in a futuristic museum people are being cryogenically preserved and then temporarily restored to life to be gaped and gawped at. But unaware of the watching audience the exhibits live out their lives in an infinite loop of life and death. But when a stone gets thrown the glass shatters and the loop becomes undone…” CYAC, Flyer for People in Glass Cases Shouldn’t Throw Stones.

The last weekend of August 2010 was also the last holiday weekend before the beginning of the 2010/11 school year. Therefore, the Manchester Museum was full of families. The Museum, actually, offered a great variety of activities specially targeted at families with children of school age and younger. The performance of Glass Cases was not announced in the Manchester Museum brochure or its advertisements. Audiences and visitors got to know about the show through either Contact or they discovered it while they entered the museum.

The search for a key was built up during the first three scenes. However, it was subsequently dropped until the penultimate scene. Here it shot to importance as the person found to possess the key was first dragged away and later tried by a grand jury.
waiting, conversations with other casual users or the observation of museum exhibits in passing. *Glass Cases* sometimes confronted casual users with unclear situations. They needed to decide, for example, if what they saw was part of the performance or the museum.

*Glass Cases* queried the political, social, cultural and historical meaning of collecting and displaying in public places. Broadly speaking, *Glass Cases* imagined a museum of the future in which objects come alive, leaving their glass cases, boxes and niches and begin to interact with their observers. In this way the performance asks questions about what we collect, why we collect, who has got control over what is included and what is excluded. *Glass Cases* also queried how objects are displayed and what that means for the visiting public and their relation to the objects. *Glass Cases* is a succession of small scenes and performance installations. It combines several performing art styles: street theatre, clowning, installation and performance art. Casual users were welcomed by two clowns dressed as guards in the foyer of the Manchester Museum. The clowns/guards guided the casual users through several places to the final stage: the Mammal gallery. The performance of *Glass Cases* has fifteen scenes and took place in eleven locations on four levels.

This section discusses the research material obtained through Walking Fieldwork, a qualitative research method. This method was used to investigate respondents’ experiences of *People in Glass Cases Shouldn’t Throw Stones* in the Manchester Museum. Six research couples were identified before the show. For the research they re-traced the steps they had taken during the promenade performance. While walking from site to site they talked about and, probed into, each other’s responses to the performance via a conversation. Research couples were given a voice recorder and a photo camera. The voice recorder was used to
record their dialogue, while the camera served as a tool to deliver a snapshot of participants in certain spaces. Participants’ responses were transcribed, analysed and experiences identified.

The research respondents were selected by invitation. Invitations were circulated by email at Contact and the University of Manchester. Most respondents were, therefore, part of or associated with either organisation. However, a member of the Library Theatre, an actress from Manchester and a teacher from Cheshire were also recruited. The familiarity of respondents was one criterion according to which respondents were coupled. For example, one Contact staff member invited her mother. They formed one research couple. In other cases the coupling of respondents had to be arranged according to their availability. In those cases respondents were invited to come to the Manchester Museum early in order to allow time to get acquainted with their research partner. After their induction they joined the other 28 casual users. Respondents could either walk the site-specific promenade performance with one another or independently. In most performances of Glass Cases at least one research couple took part, in some performances, however, there were two.97

Couple’s responses to Glass Cases can be divided into four areas: firstly, expectations towards the performance, its presentation and the relationship of casual users to the theatrical event; secondly, the interaction between casual users and performers; thirdly the expectations towards the performers and, fourthly, the casual users’ personal comfort. The first group - performance, presentation and event - is the biggest with a number of complex entries. It reveals that spectators

97 Overall, six performances took place; two on Thursday, Friday and Saturday of the last week of August 2010. People In Glass Cases Shouldn’t Throw Stones is a site-specific performance in the Manchester Museum.
are likely to bring a set of pre-conceived ideas or frames to performances. Some of those frames are so engrained in contemporary theatre practices that they are largely taken for granted. Spectators, for example, take it as a given that they will be able to see and hear. When this is not the case they notice and remark on it. Spectators equally expect to be able to fully concentrate on a performance. When the context of the performance distracted casual users they noticed this and sometimes commented upon it. Most casual users also assumed that performances have a meaning and that it is one of their tasks to pick up the clues along the way in order to uncover ‘it’. Casual users expect performances to be clear, to make sense and to operate with some form of comprehensible logic. In the second group – interactions between casual users and performers – casual users expressed their wish to stay in control. They want to know which rules govern the interaction between themselves and the performers. Casual users were often uncomfortable if they perceived that the rules of the engagement changed or remained tacit. The third group – expectations towards performers – again touches on their need to know what kind of relationship they enter into. It also formulates that performers need to display certain standards and conventions for casual users to feel comfortable. The fourth group - expectations of safety and personal comfort - describe features which help casual users to feel well during the performance. The need for personal safety is paramount here. This includes physical features like the temperature of a room, the need for personal space and a comfortable distance between spectators and performers.98

98 The right kind of distance between performers and audiences is dependent on the space and the situation in which a performance takes place. During Glass Cases one participant remarked that she tried to motivate other casual users to move closer to the performers. She tried to close the gap between the performers and audiences because she was aware that while they were watching a
The number of casual users changed constantly during the performance because visitors of the museum were free to join the group of casual users of *Glass Cases* on their tour around the building. Some visitors of the museum became casual users and some casual users became visitors who preferred the museum’s exhibitions. It was easy for them to leave the other casual users.\(^9\) Walking Fieldwork, on average, commenced approximately 20 minutes after the end of each performance.\(^1\) The majority of the participants in Walking Fieldwork were women, between 20 and 60 years of age. However, one man, in the age group of 20 to 30, took part as well. Most participants were of a similar age. Only one couple had an age difference of more than twenty years.

The research material of Walking Fieldwork-participants indicates that their previous theatre-going experiences were decisive for how they related to this performance. The majority of their expectations were derived from mainstream and alternative theatre. The following list of expectations draws on the previously mentioned four groups: performance, interaction, performers and comfort. It is a selective list, which does not claim any form of completeness or representativeness. What it provides, however, is a snapshot into the experiences of a small group of people who were faced with a performance which challenged their expectations on several levels. Notwithstanding the non-mainstream character of the site-specific promenade performance participants’ expectations

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\(^9\) To leave the group of casual users could be easily achieved by staying on in one place, while the group moved on. Casual users could also simply walk in another direction.

\(^1\) Couples could only start after 20 minutes, as they had to negotiate their way back from the Mammal Gallery in the first floor in one wing of the museum to the ground floor on the main building. This is a long way which offers many different attractive and inviting displays along its path.
were mostly guided by what would, generally, be considered ‘standards’ in the theatres. In the ‘classic paradigm’ spectators are accustomed to see and hear everything that is presented for them on a stage. They equally anticipate to be presented with ‘clues’ or other structures which help them to uncover the meaning of the performance. Spectators want to feel safe, to know what is going on. They want to know what they can expect and to be able to concentrate on the performance. They want to be free to define their level of involvement and they want to feel that they and the performers are in control of their respective parts of the performance. For example, some participants who knew Contact and the Manchester Museum where ‘anticipating’ what kind of performance it would be. “I expected a loud performance,” one participant said (L&B 2010). Some participants expected a certain form of humour (M&N 2010) and others a narration throughout (L&B 2010). May users struggled when expectations failed materialise. Some could adapt to unexpected circumstances, the comments of others revealed how challenged they felt during Glass Cases. Insecurity and confusion were frequently experienced. These insecurities are especially telling as they indicate that most participants used features of mainstream theatre-going experiences to indicate what the performance lacked. In other words, in talking to casual users about the shortcomings of the performance revealed what they had expected. Those expectations are generally derived from the ‘classic paradigm’ and mainstream repertory theatre traditions. Due to the scarcity of similar non-mainstream performances, respondents related Glass Cases with dissimilar mainstream theatre formats.

Respondents’ experiences can be characterised as a mixture of thoughts and emotions, positives and negatives were roughly equal to each other. On the
one hand, worries, insecurities, confusion, fear of distraction and a search for meaning were preoccupying some respondents. On the other hand, however, those thoughts and emotions were accompanied by an appreciation of humour, by feelings of engagement and by acts of reflection.

Most respondents expressed some form of worry: that they would be in the way of others (J&P 2010); that they might be made to dance (ibid.); that their way of interacting could be inappropriate (R&L 2010) or that they were not sure ‘what was going on’ (S&L 2010). A majority of respondents mentioned that they felt distracted when they passed displays in the museum. The distraction was experienced as negative because they felt that their concentration should be exclusively with the performance in spite of the exhibits of the museum. Some casual users felt continuously tempted when they passed exhibits on their way from one performance site to the other. The ‘temptation’ to get distracted increased as some glass cases were used as backdrop for a number of scenes. This meant that casual users had to decide, from moment to moment, what or whom to give attention to. Some casual users experienced this situation as a constant battle for their attention because exhibits were readily soaking up wandering attention.

A majority of couples were also confused by the performance as a whole or parts of it. Some of the features which made participants uneasy were the ninja scene (L&B 2010); the end of the performance (ibid.); the plot (or lack thereof) (ibid.); the perceived lack of explanation/guidance (J&P 2010); the risk of getting into trouble for participating in the ‘wrong’ way (M&N 2010); questions over how casual users were expected to relate to the performance (E&K 2010); the fear of saying the wrong thing (ibid.) or the role of casual users in general (S&L 2010).
What can be gleaned from this case study? When casual users are faced with unfamiliar performance genres they fall back on their experiences of other performances to guide them. It is the aim of such connection-making to relate the ‘unknown’ to the known and make it thereby accessible. Performances which casual users then called upon can be of similar and also of dissimilar character. Generally, spectators feel ‘safer’ when they know that they are able to act appropriately and can relate experiences to a known cultural framework. In this way they can relate the known to the unknown and build up a network of orientation. Unknown situations lose some of their troublesome ‘unknown-ness’ when they can be located in a network of experiences and be experienced with a feeling of safety. In this way ‘unknowns’ can be mapped onto the ‘knowns’. When experiences are of a different kind they have the potential to call the cultural competence of the bearer into doubt. This explains why so many participants refer back to ‘what they are used to’ so often even in circumstances which are clearly of another kind. It could be argued that the constant referring back to ‘knowns’ makes it easier for casual users to deal with new and challenging performances.

This case study has shown that personal expectations and the possession of ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu 1984) influence casual users’ experiences. Similar to the Loreto College case study, co-creation here takes the form of causal users mapping unknown to their known experiences. Some participants were familiar with some of the performance formats used during *People in Glass Cases Shouldn’t Throw Stones*. For example, some expressed preference for, or dislike of, text-based theatre; some had been exposed to Theatre-in-Education and some voiced a preference for exhibitions in conventional or unconventional settings. Few participants in the survey, however, had experienced all of the above in a site-
specific, promenade performance. The lack of a narrative made it necessary for casual users to co-create the theatrical performance in their own way. They had to combine different fields of the arts (fine arts, sculpture, performing arts) in unique ways and connect performed ‘vignettes’ with unforeseeable occurrences on their way from one performance place to another.

Conclusion
This chapter has shown that the use of creative research methodologies can result in ‘adequate descriptions’ (Harvey and Knox 2011:107). Harvey and Knox transform Geertz’ ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973 (a):5-6, 9-10) into a concept acknowledging the contingency and relationality of descriptions (Harvey and Knox 2011:117). The analysis goes a step further in exploring casual users’ complex behaviours which make up the ‘theatrical event’. The participants in the workshops at Loreto College utilised their knowledge to co-create theatrical events as a medium of discovery.

The Loreto College students used the performance of Two Gentleman of Verona to discover a familiar subject (Shakespeare’s play) in an unfamiliar context (Contact) and with an unfamiliar presentation style (street theatre and African theatre).

Through studying Shakespeare’s text and the historical situation in which it was once performed, they began to discover that the situation of spectators is historically determined: it is always changing and developing. The enquiry into the behaviour of spectators of Shakespeare’s time in the creative workshops made it possible for Loreto College students to look at the situation of historic and contemporary spectators with fresh eyes. They were now able to acknowledge what had been seemingly familiar to them: social. S functions and conditions in the
theatre, thereby, became visible as contingent and changing over time. On the one hand, by reflecting on, and re-creating, spectators’ behaviour, students were discovering taken-for-granted aspects of theatre traditions they had stopped paying attention to. On the other hand they encountered other non-mainstream theatre practices, such as African theatre and street theatre. The performance made students discover circumstances and practices which they had, so far, rarely been in contact with.

The second part of this chapter examined the responses of six research pairs, who re-walked the promenade performance of Glass Cases in the Manchester Museum. Causal users’ memories of Glass Cases often relate to complex moments of the performance, which were extraordinary on both sides of the scale. Casual users’ experiences of Glass Cases were often connected and, at the same time, different from experiences of the ‘classic paradigm’. Almost all affirmative experiences were congruent with experiences which audiences can usually expect from performances congruent with the ‘classic paradigm’. Moments of Glass Cases which casual users liked were similar to such performances. These moments thereby ‘affirmed’ their knowledge about theatre. Some respondents, for example, ‘liked the costumes’ (S&L 2010); others enjoyed the dance of the Cave Women (M&N 2010); and some were enjoying the gorgeous space (mammal gallery) as much as the performance itself (R&L 2010). In contrast, experiences which did not match the ‘classic paradigm’ were often perceived as challenging. Each respondent felt unsettled and confused at some point during the performance. This can mainly be attributed to at least four reasons: first, the lack of appropriate signposting; second, the challenging nature of interactions between casual users and performers; third, casual users’ expectations; and, fourth, their observations of
other casual users. Each of these four reasons indicates that casual users experienced *Glass Cases* differently compared with audiences of the ‘classic paradigm’. Those four reasons will now be briefly examined.

Firstly, the ‘classic paradigm’ provides ‘signposts’ to audiences and performers in regard to their roles. Those roles contain guidelines and also clear limits. Signposts are often structural and habitual. The theatre building itself gives certain clues as to what is appropriate and what is expected of audiences. For example, stages in many eighteen and nineteenth century theatres are separated from the auditorium by an orchestra pit. This structural separation, has, with time, translated into a habitual rule which holds that ‘audience members should not go up on stage’ unless they are specifically asked to do so. This tacit rule gives orientation to audiences as they thereby ‘know’ that they are expected to observe what is presented for them sitting in their seats. On the other hand, audiences are discouraged from physically accessing the stage and interacting with the performers. This knowledge helps audiences to ‘settle down’ into as witnesses as their role sets the limits and possibilities of the engagement. A number of research pairs commented on the ‘unsettledness’ they experienced during *Glass Cases*. To feel ‘settled’ means to know ones’ role and to be in control of the encounter. When casual users are settled, they know their roles and what is expected of them. Not knowing their roles means they feel unsettled. As *Glass Cases* took place in a museum, alternatives for structural and behavioural signposts were needed. The rules of the engagement had to be implicitly or explicitly made clear to all casual users. However, this performance did not do so sufficiently. Casual users did not receive enough guidance as to which roles they were supposed to play from moment to moment. This resulted in casual users feeling unsure how they were
meant to act. Uncertainty made all research pairs uncomfortable at some point during the performance. A lack of internal or external signposts meant that casual users where unable to ‘settle down’ into one role. Instead, they had to ‘be on alert’ and look out for clues as to which role they were expected to play and to negotiate the time in-between.

Secondly, the lack of signposts and clear guidance made the level of participation unclear to casual users. In the words of one respondent:

I was unsure how much to participate. (R&L 2010)

Through the general set up of the performance an expectation was levelled at casual users that they should interact in some way with the performers. However, it was not clear, how much participation was expected from moment to moment because clear indications regulating interactions between performers and casual users were either ambiguous or missing. As casual users were unsure about their role in Glass Cases, they were equally insecure as to which rules governed each specific moment during the performance. One casual user commented on this confusion:

Even though I am a performer... I found the participation embarrassing because I was not sure how I was expected to act. Should I ‘really go for it’, or ‘just be good’ and ‘go along’ with it. (ES&KG 2010)

Thirdly, there were clear differences in what casual users expected and what they were confronted with during Glass Cases. Most of these expectations can be traced back to performances which conform to the ‘classic paradigm’. For example, audiences can expect to see and hear every moment of the performance if they sit in a theatre. Since research pairs could only see and hear most, but not all, of Glass Cases, they noticed, remembered, and, finally, commented upon it during their
Walking Fieldwork-tours. At the same time, many respondents also acknowledged that they were irritated when they found their attention wandering. Many performances in the ‘classic paradigm’ offer a single focus and have a consecutive nature. It is rare that theatre audiences have to split their attention between sequences which happen at the same time. Audiences in the ‘classic paradigm’ do not usually have to deal with multiple foci, since they have come to regard the ‘single focus’ and consecutive nature of performances as ‘theatre’ per se. Casual users of *Glass Cases*, therefore, had to deal with multiple ‘obstacles’ which made their experiences of this performance different from performances in the “classic paradigm”.

Fourthly, and lastly, another difference in how casual users experienced *Glass Cases* is now considered. For regular audiences of mainstream repertory theatres, it is rare to notice other audience members during the performance, as most face the stage and are reluctant to turn in any other way. This reluctance can be attributed to three factors: ‘not wanting to miss anything on stage’; ‘not wanting to disturb others or draw attention to oneself’; and to the fact that people who ostensibly turn in their seats can, in some cases, be perceived as performers, rather than audience members. For these reasons, it is rare that audience members take notice of or interact with other audience members. In *Glass Cases*, casual users constantly noticed each other, as performers rendered different parts of the room into a stage and made users turn with them. Performers sometimes played in front of casual users, behind them or also in their midst. Casual users would also notice each other when they were promenading from one place to the next. Some casual users casually talked with each other on their way from one scene and the next. Other casual users, in turn, were involuntary witnesses to these conversations.
Some casual users asked others when they could not see or hear properly and needed information about the performance. Lastly, casual users also noticed how other casual users reacted to the performance. Several research pairs noticed, for example, that some young children enjoyed interacting with the performers so much that it became more than a game. One boy was given the task of ‘security guard’ by the performers. His efforts to copy his masters’ posture, movements and attitude were incorporated into the performance by the performers and caught the eye of several casual users. The boy’s mother commented to one research pair that he will be as ‘high as a kite’ for the rest of the day because he was beaming with pride about the encouragement of the ‘guards’ and about his achievements. Most casual users became voluntary or involuntary parts of Glass Cases and, thereby, experienced the performance differently in comparison to performances which comply with the ‘classic paradigm’.

The current chapter discussed casual users’ experiences of two performances: firstly, a performance which was invited to Contact and, secondly, a CYAC production. Using these two case studies, it was demonstrated that experiences of casual users differ from those of audiences theatres in the “classic paradigm”. Casual users’ experiences are influenced by the knowledge they bring to the theatre and the way in which they allow themselves to engage with performances Contact puts on. It could also be shown innovative research methods impact on research. The following chapter continues the investigation of the experiences of Contact’s casual users. It looks at casual users’ experiences, by investigating several short qualitative video interviews and a longitudinal case study. However, it concentrates on the first case study and uses an innovative method – snapshot video interviews – to examine casual users’ impressions of
Contact in general and an established method – a longitudinal study – to consider the influence of time on long-term users’ experience of an off-site production *People in Glass Cases Shouldn’t Throw Stones.*

Walking Fieldwork is an adequate method to research complex, multi-levelled experience. It builds on trust and familiarity between research couples. It is, therefore, difficult to find sufficient numbers of research couples where familiarity pre-exists. It is a challenge to ‘produce’ familiarity between strangers in time for the research to start. Trust is needed between researcher and respondents as research pairs act mostly independently of the researcher during their fieldwork. Research pairs need some sense of responsibility to balance contributions to the topic with deviations; flexibility is needed. Difficulties are anticipated in mainstream theatres settings and with casual users of in-house productions. Walking Fieldwork is an unusual method which needs openness to alternative ways of doing research and ways of relating between researcher and respondent as well as respondent and respondent.

7 Chapter 7 – Researching Users through Established Methods

The previous chapter looked at casual users’ experiences of a travelling production of Shakespeare’s *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and CYAC’s *Glass Cases*. It used an innovative and an established method to explore user practices which depart from the ‘classic paradigm’. It showed that casual users experience performances hosted by Contact in different way compared to performances which conform to the ‘classic paradigm’. The last chapter also showed that innovative methods are suited to explore users’ experiences which differ from the ‘classic paradigm’. The
This chapter focuses on casual users’ experiences of Contact in general and on their experiences of Contact’s People in Glass Cases Shouldn’t Throw Stones. It is structured in two parts; the first part uses short video interviews – Jackson calls them ‘snapshot interviews’ (Jackson and Kidd 2008:25) – which took place immediately after visiting a performance at Contact. The second part of the chapter investigates some longitudinal aspects of casual users’ experiences of People in Glass Cases Shouldn’t Throw Stones. The longitudinal investigation of Glass Cases continues the argument from the previous chapter, when casual users’ experiences of same performance were investigated through Walking Fieldwork. This chapter, however, homes in on the effect of time on casual users’ experiences. Time is important in this context, as experiences of the theatrical event change with time. A ‘theatrical event’ refers to experiences outside of the performance which, nonetheless, form an essential part of theatre-going, for example in the form of pre-performance and post-performance periods.

7.1 Short, qualitative video interviews

Short, qualitative (‘snapshot’) video interviews have been conducted between November 2010 and December 2011 by Contact’s young hosts. In 13 months 187 clips have been collected. More than two thirds of all respondents were women and around half of all interviewees were from an ethnic background. Most respondents were between 20 to 40 years of age; few have been less than 14 or more than 65 years old. Interviewees were approached after more than 40 different performances, events, showcases, festivals or conferences. Most respondents had come to Contact as casual users, performers, festival participants,
conference delegates, organisers and volunteers. Proceedings took place at every
time of the day and, sometimes, also late at night. Respondents were asked
questions which centred on expectations and experiences of Contact and its
programmes, performances, festivals and events.

The number of hosts allowed covering some events but not all. The
quantity of recordings varied due to personal and situational reasons. Interviews
were between 15 to 60 seconds long; the average length for a video interview was
35 seconds. After each video interview casual users were asked to formalise their
consent in writing\textsuperscript{101} and to indicate their age. This led to the insight that there is a
great variety in the age range of respondents.\textsuperscript{102} The youngest casual user who
participated in the video research was between ten and 14 and the oldest between
60 to 75 years old.

Some video interviews were conducted immediately after casual users
entered Contact’s building. These interviews focussed on expectations of Contact
in general and on the performance casual users had for. Most interviews, however,
were conducted after performances. This calls for an alertness of ‘situated-ness’
and the immediacy of the responses. Prior to the approach of the interviewers\textsuperscript{103},
none of the respondents knew that they would be asked for their experiences of
Contact and its performances. The short (‘snapshot’) video interviews differ from
the longitudinal interviews in the second part of this chapter as respondents

\textsuperscript{101} Users are also asked to give their permission either for their data to be used for research only or for marketing purposes, too.

\textsuperscript{102} Respondents, however, were not asked to state their beliefs about their ethnicity during video research. Observations about ethnicity, therefore, have a rather limited currency in this section of the study.

\textsuperscript{103} All respondents were interviewed by a Contact host. Contact hosts are all young people, who have
gone through CYAC or other Contact programmes or events.
needed to decide with little more than a moment’s notice if they agreed to be interviewed. The respondents to the longitudinal interviews had given their permission directly after the performance of Glass Cases and approximately four weeks before they were approached for the first follow-up interview.

Expectations are formed based on previous experiences and knowledge. Expectations, it could be argued, are therefore part of the very fabric of human nature. By their nature they are connected and networked with previous cultural and social experiences. The importance of expectations in theatrical events is their function as ‘touchstone’ and connectors within a network of experiences. Expectations are often used to value, mesh and validate experiences contained in one theatrical event with those experienced in other theatrical events.

An important aspect of experiences is their ‘ongoing’ character. In other words, experiences are hardly ever ‘pure’ and rarely of a ‘stand alone’ nature. Experiences are invariably connected to phenomena which are already known to casual users. They can be of a similar and also dissimilar character. Almost every spectator entering a theatre auditorium or performance space for the first time will have encountered the phenomena of light, sound, colour, movement and speech before. Many spectators will also have encountered others playing a public ‘role’ in everyday life; observed a theatre performance or participated in a ritual or a ‘make believe’ situation. Rather than the phenomena themselves, it is the specific combination of cultural phenomena which distinguishes ‘drama, theatre and performance’ from everyday life (Thom 1993). Therefore, it is important to recognise that spectators connect previously experienced cultural phenomena with a theatrical event. An appreciation or ‘taste’ (Bourdieu’s ‘social capital’) in cultural or social fields normally develops through the repetition of activities.
During interviews casual users are hardly ever exclusively communicating about one specific performance. Instead, interviewer and casual users are entering a network of past experiences and conversations about such experiences. Conversations of this kind will, in all probability, go back much further in the life of the individual. Those ‘conversations’ could also be conceptualised as a network which connects previous life and aesthetic experiences with present theatrical experiences. In most cases such conversations exceed the frame researchers use to focus their work. It can thus be seen that all experiences are connected and to interview a casual user automatically connects their present experiences with earlier ones. In the pre-event period of any given performance a number of experiences and expectations are building up which will have an impact on how casual users will later mark, process and articulate their experiences.

Respondents expressed a great variety of opinions about Contact. Six major sub-categories emerged from the short interviews. They concerned Contact’s atmosphere, the inside of the building, the outside of the building, Contact’s programming, the space (as opposed to the place) and the experiences Contact provides. Which ‘story’ emerged and what does the research material reveal about casual users’ experiences?

The findings suggest that Contact is, in principle, measured against a more general perception of the ‘classic paradigm’, and mainstream repertory theatre more specifically. Casual users utilise the ‘classic paradigm’ as a ‘benchmark’ against which they measure Contact and also their own experiences of it. In general, they expect Contact to have similar qualities to mainstream repertory theatres and to be different at the same time. Casual users employed the term
‘theatre’ both for mainstream repertory theatres and also for Contact, without regard for the differences between them.

Many of Contact’s casual users have a firm idea of what a theatre experience is meant to be. Their experiences of Contact, on the other hand, are different from the ‘classic paradigm’. Casual users point towards a wide range of features which mark those differences. On the one hand there are a great number of ‘hard and fast’ facts about Contact which mark it as different from mainstream repertory theatres. These are mostly building-based characteristics such as the colours of the walls, floor and ceiling, the daylight inside the building, the public PCs, the art work on display and its Lounge. These qualities mark Contact as different from a material, ‘building-based’ point of view. At the same time they seem to be important to many users. Contact’s physical appearance gives the building, in Goffman’s sense, a youthful, designed and welcoming ‘front’ (Goffman 1959). However, most respondents regularly mention ‘soft’ factors much more often when asked why they like Contact. They refer to its ‘wonderful atmosphere’ (FC1/184 2010), its ‘chilled environment’ (FC2/1 2010) or the ‘great space’ (FC1/176 2010) it provides for its users. In terms of its atmosphere Contact’s casual users stress the friendliness of its staff (FC1/49 2010); its relaxedness (FC2/109 2010); that it is welcoming (FC2/101 2010); that it appears like a “down to earth theatre” (FC1/4 2010); that most people at Contact are friendly and that music is already welcoming users outside and follows them inside. The words most frequently used to describe Contact’s atmosphere were: friendly, small, theatre, chilled, music and nice.

As the word atmosphere suggests, a majority of responses in this category build on perceptions of casual users based on emotional and sometimes
imperceptible features. Contact influences and has control over some of these aspects. Others can be said to be individual responses to a variety of influences. Contact surely does have rather little control over how some of its users appear to other users. This however, is to show casual users’ perceptions of Contact as a place where “everyone is really friendly” (FC1/145 2010) (Female_30-40_White_British) and reflects the complex and multi-layered nature of human perception (Gibson 1972; 1986).

The outside of Contact’s building was most frequently described as interesting, great, bizarre, fantastic and ugly. It can be assumed that many casual users’ compare Contact’s building with the design of mainstream repertory theatres with their imposing fronts, Doric columns, staircases and other classic architectural features. Some casual users like Contact’s building from the outside (FC2/109 2010). Others, however, have reservations about the appearance of the building.

“[It is] not my favourite building externally”. One long-term user compared it with a ‘castle’ (AC in: Creative Leaders 2009). Some casual users describe it as ‘ugly’ (FC1/65 2010). In general, Contact’s building is most often described as ‘bizarre but quite interesting’ (FC1/159 2010). This indicates that some features of the outside of the building are seen as unsettling, whereas others are seen as modern (FC1/105 2010) and fitting a contemporary theatre.

The inside of Contact’s building was most frequently described with the following terms: people, meeting, new, unexpected, energy, world, friends and

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104 Some casual users respond positively to a relatively few occurrences of friendliness. A person, say, might just need to meet two other casual users who smile and encounter another one who allows that person to jump the queue on the bar to have the impression that ‘everybody seems to be friendly’. Another person might need to be treated very courteously by a great number of people to widen his experience of a few friendly people to a majority of Contact users. Or, like some interviewees did, to describe all Contact users generally as friendly.
The responses directed towards features of Contact’s interior point towards differences compared with theatres compliant with the ‘classic paradigm’. In the latter one can expect a degree of formality, an upmarket interior and “people [who] look posh” (FC2/1 2010). Interviewees most often point towards those features which differ from formal theatre interiors: the colourfulness of the place (FC2/13 2010), that it is stylish and modern (FC2/108 2010), that it is bright (FC2/14 2010) and that:

It’s not like an old fashioned theatre... [It] is really nice. It’s really modern... It’s quite exotic... It’s different. (FC2/107 2010)

The concepts which were most frequently used to describe Contact’s programming were: new work, variety, entertainment, talent, experimental, unexpected, community, impressed and different. The ‘difference’ many respondents alluded to referred to Contact’s programming compared with the ‘classic paradigm’. Many other theatres also have ‘new writing’-programmes. A focus on the creation of ‘new work’, however, is shared by a few theatres in the UK only. Contact’s focus on ‘new writing’ (FC1/16 2010) and also new work is clearly reflected among the responses. At the same time respondents recognise that Contact introduces new talent to a wider public. Many respondents stressed the importance of Contact’s experimental and community work (FC1/55 2010). More experienced casual users know that at Contact they must ‘expect the unexpected’. For less experienced casual users this sometimes comes as a surprise which they notice. A fairly typical response is:

[I] wasn’t expecting it. It was really good. A bit different, something I have not seen before, but it was good. (FC1/175 2010)
The words which were most frequently used to describe Contact in terms of the space it provides were: nice, friendly, bar, theatre, brilliant, great, different, good, lovely and cool. Respondents’ views on Contact indicate that they view it as more than a mainstream repertory theatre. They see it as a ‘theatre plus’ which does many things for different groups of people. The bar is mentioned by many respondents (among others: FC1/58 2010) because it serves nice food (FC1/6 2010). However, its main function is to provide a social space in which the users of this theatre can come together informally regardless of which role they play. The bar is shared by students and university staff, by members of arts organisations, by young people and old, by people with different ethnic backgrounds, by established and emerging artists and by long-term and casual users. Contact’s bar is a place which facilitates a culture in which it is possible to speak and collaborate with everyone. Contact also offers different spaces for a number of occasions, friendly staff and, generally, ‘a great vibe’ (FC2/111 2010). The lines between casual and long-term users’ roles at Contact are blurring in the utterances of the respondents. Some casual users see Contact as more than a place which offers performances. They also recognise that different communities meet there, that it is quite ‘student-based’ (FC2/109 2010) and that it actively supports young people. Casual users experience Contact as a cultural hub, where many things happen rather than a mainstream repertory theatre:

[It is] ... a great space. It does fantastic things. (FC1/176 2010)

Several long-term users, too, see Contact as a place in which they work, lead workshops and support young people’s development in training, theatre productions, events and festivals. While they are working there they are also
becoming increasingly aware of Contact as a place in which they might want to showcase work in the future:

Contact is iconic in this city because of its space, the look of it, the facilities. It is cool. ... Great place to try and do a show. (FC1/58 2010)

And:

It would be really fun to perform in there. (FC1/166 2010)

Contact appeals to its long-term and casual users because it offers a view on how a contemporary theatre might look and feel like. It is a modern building with many faces. It is colourful, bright, youthful and, in the words of a casual user, has:

great stuff on the wall. [It is] very young, very lively. Good look. It’s just what you want from a small theatre. (FC2/5 2010)

Contact’s most important feature, however, is that it offers its users a space in which it is possible to try out different roles and different theatrical experiences.

7.2 Some longitudinal aspects of People in Glass Cases Shouldn’t Throw Stones

The discussion of People in Glass Cases Shouldn’t Throw Stones follows on from the debate of the same case study in the previous chapter. The present section, however, concentrates on time and its effects on casual users’ experiences of Glass Cases.

According to Bryman, longitudinal research is a research design in which research material (data) is collected on a sample of people on at least two occasions (2012:712). Occasions during which respondents are asked to provide information about their behaviour or attitudes are often referred to as the ‘phases’ or ‘waves’ of a study (Taris 2000:12). ‘Waves’ of a study are used to measure
change over time. Longitudinal studies are, more often used in quantitative, rather than in qualitative research, as the number of people involved (the ‘sample’) in such studies is normally rather large. According to Taris, this can range from 200 to several thousand participants (2000:12). In contrast, the longitudinal study at *Glass Cases* is based on a small group of eleven people. These eleven people were recruited from participants in the Walking Fieldwork case study, Contact hosts, Contact staff and their friends and family, other Manchester-based theatres, the University of Manchester, and also from people who declared on the questionnaire that they would be happy to take part in a telephone conversation later.

The questionnaires were handed out after the end of the performance by Contact hosts. Almost one hundred casual users returned questionnaires after six performances (August 2010). After four weeks (September 2010) twenty five casual users, who had agreed to be contacted in the questionnaire, were called. Seventeen of them could be reached and were subsequently interviewed by telephone. After four months (January 2011), eleven remained available for a further interview. During the preparation phase for the follow-up interviews it appeared that none of those who had declared an interest in continuing the conversation about *Glass Cases* in their questionnaires – other than those who are already personally known – could be reached for the first follow-up interview. All respondents bar one, for this reason, are people who have a relationship with Contact. The majority are long-term Contact users and Contact staff. One student and one theatre professional made themselves available for both interviews. There is a considerable overlap between respondents of Walking Fieldwork (chapter six) and the longitudinal study of casual users’ experiences in this chapter.
The questionnaire and the follow-on interviews attempted to measure change in casual users' experiences of Glass Cases. Longitudinal interviews in theatre are rare. This has several reasons; one of the main ones is that students of Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies are rarely educated in using empirical research methods. There are, however, some longitudinal investigations. Jackson and Kidd's Performing, Learning and Heritage is a well-known study which includes a longitudinal study of museum theatre (2008). The study of casual users' experiences of Glass Cases, it can be argued, it not a full-blown longitudinal study, as its sample size is too small, and the time between its waves or phases was too short. It is, nonetheless, hoped that it will contribute some valuable insights to casual users' long-term experiences of a Contact performance.

The reaction of an audience to a performance or the theatre in general depends upon this narrative an 'entry narrative' (Jackson and Kidd 2008:8). This narrative includes:

preconceptions and expectations, which are shaped by prevailing cultural norms and assumptions, as well as by visitors’ own social and educational background and prior experience. (Jackson and Kidd 2008:8)

In the same place, Jackson suggests a 'cycle of response', in which four main parts and two commentaries influence each other in a self-replicating process: prior knowledge/motivation (1) leads to engagement (2), which, in turn, leads to recall/understanding (3), which, subsequently, leads to inspiration (4). This cycle is influenced by meta-commentaries of the performance and the institution at different points of the loop (ibid.).

Audience members often remember, make sense of, and reinterpret experiences of a performance during the 'recall' stage. Several casual users
indicated that they highly valued the opportunity to reflect with others (via group interviews, creative workshops) on the performance and its connections with the rest of the site. Some indicated that they are conscious that experiences change through conversations after an event (KD 2010; KP 2010; BG 2011). As an effect the experience of the performance, the site and the event as a whole is often enriched.

*Glass Cases* took place on Thursday 26th, Friday, 27th and Saturday 28th of August 2010. It was the last weekend of the summer holidays and the Manchester Museum has traditionally been very busy and utilised during normal opening hours. *Glass Cases* was a series of scenes and installations and took place across three floors. It was not, as one respondent assumed, “a play in a room in a museum” (BG 2011). The scenes and installations were connected by two tour guides (performers ‘in role’ as guards/clowns) and the search for ‘a key’. The theme of the ‘search’ connected several (but not all) scenes and installations. The performance involved direct interaction between four groups: performers, casual users, museum visitors, and Contact hosts and Museum staff.

It is significant for the longitudinal study that *Glass Cases* is a site-specific performance and exists on the fringes or outside of the realm of the ‘classic paradigm’. Regular interaction between performers and casual users, together with some alternative characteristics of the performance, position it in this way. There are several other features of the performance which challenge casual users’ expectations. Firstly, many casual users feel they are entitled to certain characteristics of the ‘space’ they are occupying: they expect to effortlessly see, hear, and be comfortable. Those expectations are mainly formed by practices of the ‘classic paradigm’ and the conditions mainstream repertory theatres’ provide
for their audiences. Secondly, casual users also routinely expect certain qualities from a play. A play needs to have a plot, a structure, recognisable characters, it has to make sense, and many audience members would also expect it to have a ‘message’. Thirdly, *Glass Cases* also challenges casual users’ understanding of their own ‘role’ in alternative participatory theatre performances.

**Research material**
The following research material was collected during and after the performance of *Glass Cases*: questionnaires, field notes, still images, video, and also follow-up interviews.

**Findings**
Information from the participants of the longitudinal study has been taken at three points: firstly, immediately after the end of the performance (August 2010); secondly, after four weeks (September 2010); and, thirdly, after four months (January 2011). Each will be looked at some detail now.

Firstly, a total of ninety three questionnaires were returned immediately after the performance. They showed that many casual users responded, in at least three different ways, to the performance: positive, negative, or some ground in between. No response was sustained throughout the entire performance; a ‘patchwork’ of different reactions seems to have been the norm. Some parts of the performance produced positive others rather adverse reactions. Many parts, however, seem to have ‘unsettled’ many casual users.

The majority of casual users who filled in the questionnaire said that the performance made them feel: ‘happy’ (48), ‘engaged’ (38), and ‘surprised’ (27). At the same time, almost a third of the total number of respondents said that the performance made them feel ‘confused’ (25), other felt ‘bored’ (6), ‘tired’ (5), or
‘angry’ (2). An aspect which was not directly asked for but which came out of the comments on the questionnaires, is that many casual users felt ‘unsettled’ by some parts or aspects of Glass Cases.

Several casual users felt ‘involved’ in, and surprised about, the performance, and felt positive about their experience. There were many parts which were greatly appreciated, among them its humour, its interactive character, and the space in which it took place. Many casual users had, at the same time, some objections. These objections were mostly raised because the experience of Glass Cases deviated from what one could expect from performances in mainstream repertory theatres. A majority of respondents (57), for example, declared that they could mostly see what was going on; less than a third (21) indicated that they were able to see everything. This situation was slightly better in terms of what casual users could hear: around half of all respondents (42) declared that they were able to hear everything; (37) said they that they heard most of what was said. This disparity between seeing and hearing can at least be partly explained by the fact that most performance spaces in the museum were small. The group outgrew the capacity of small rooms because many museum visitors joined each group of casual users. The size of the group, therefore, sometimes prevented all causal users from accessing the performance visually at the same time. Those who could not ‘get in’ stood behind corners, around the bend on stairs, or in corridors. However, as performers generally projected their voice well and casual users were close by, they could hear although they only might have been able to see something of what was going on.

Secondly, the four week follow-up interview took place in September 2010, when seventeen people were interviewed by telephone. During the interview, a
set of around fifteen questions were asked, which were often followed-up with subsequent questions. Generally, questions aimed to gauge, firstly, ‘recall’ of the performance, and, secondly, changes of the experience.

Generally, it could be established that Glass Cases was remembered well and in rich detail. Respondents remembered several scenes, many of which were in sequence, and they also recalled a considerable amount of detail about the performers and the site. After four weeks, casual users animatedly remembered what they liked and were clear about what they disliked. It was still the humour and the fun, together with the interactive nature of the performance and the astonishing site, which gave the impression that this performance was ‘different’ and made casual users feel positive about it. In contrast, many were still unhappy that they had not been able to see and hear everything, that the proximity to other casual users had been too small, that Glass Cases had no clear, identifiable ‘meaning’, that some felt it was too long, and that many felt ‘unsettled’ by the performance. These feelings, however, seemed to lose some of their intensity. More and more alleviating factors were becoming part of the recall. For example, one casual user expected to see a professional performance and, after not getting exactly that, left the site frustrated. After four weeks he took into account that the performers were ‘young people’ (much like himself), who had made an extraordinary ‘effort’ and that they were courageous to perform in such an ‘ambitious’ project under challenging circumstances (KD 2010).

The responses after four weeks generally consolidated the experiences expressed in the questionnaires. If casual users felt ‘positive’ about the performance overall, they would continue to be of that opinion. One respondent expressed it like this:
Distance has improved my appreciation of the show. I would like to watch it again now as it was so different and varied and because the memory fades. When a theatre piece is so visual, you want to concentrate on the visual rather than the meaning. I would like to see it a second time to concentrate on the spoken word. (BG 2010)

The general ‘mood’ casual users walked away with after the performance would often continue to travel in the same general direction, even though the opinion could, on some occasions, be backed up with slightly less detail. The direction of travel would also continue if casual users felt apprehensive about the performance.

When I first left the performance, I was not sure I had fully understood it. Usually, when I feel this way about a performance I think about it a bit more and eventually understand it. This did not happen with Glass Cases. I still feel a little frustrated. It feels like it was an ‘unfinished communication’. I want to read about it to find out about the theme. The experience is not complete. (LG 2010)

A number of respondents felt that their opinion about the performance had stayed the same. Those casual users often carefully weighed up both sides, as if to justify that they did not go either way:

My opinion has remained balanced. I thought it was fun, but not great. I know what the standards of CYAC have been in the past. Not sure whether it met these standards. There were a lot of things in the show which needed to be clarified. (JL 2010)

One complicating factor in the interviews was a tendency to resist ‘recall’ as it was perceived as a school-like ‘test’. Some respondents said that they felt ‘pressured’ and recognised their ‘wish to do well’. As adults and professionals, some felt obliged do well and, at the same time, felt negative about competitive situations of this kind.
Thirdly, eleven people could be reached for the second follow-up interview after four months (January 2011). Here the trend continued that respondents stayed with the ‘feeling’ they had about the performance. Those who had seen the performance in a positive light after four weeks continued to do so after four months; those who had been apprehensive continued to do so and, finally, those who had been equivocal stayed this way, too. There are, however, some notable exceptions. The opinion of one casual user who had been equivocal after four weeks now felt that her opinion had improved. The detailed criticism had faded into the background and a more rounded appreciation had come in its place. Other casual users, whose opinion about the performance had improved after four weeks noted that their opinions had levelled out. Their positive feeling about the performance did not fall but remained one the same level.

During the investigation, casual users have repeatedly marked their experiences as ‘different’. Differences often refer to expectations rooted in the ‘classic paradigm’. These expectations included: that there is a tacit agreement that the theatrical event is a ‘formal’ event, which means that there is a certain dress code, a behavioural code and a cluster of rules which divide the labour in a fixed way; that there are expectations directed against the kind, genre and quality of what is being performed; that audiences sit in a room and look at a stage, that audiences inhabit a personal space and have a measured proximity to other audience members; that audiences are expected to participate ‘intellectually, emotionally and spiritually’ but not ‘physically or vocally’ (Way 1981:2); that the room is reserved for those who want to observe a performance; and that performers and audiences occupy different parts of the same room.
Features of the performance which were particularly ‘liked’ by casual users included: the ‘funny’ character of the performance of *Glass Cases*; the interaction involved in the performance, the fish tank; the dancing; the security guards; the bag lady; the singing (in the last scene); the performer in the picture; the acting; the use of space; the comedic character or the performance of one particular member of the young actor's company. However, features of the performance which were ‘disliked’ by casual users included: the length of the performance; that casual users could not hear; that casual users were unable to see; that casual users were filmed (for research purposes); that casual users were not sure about the meaning or the narrative of the performance and, or the singing in the last scene.

Generally speaking, casual users perceive a number of phenomena and processes in alternative theatre practices as ‘Contact-like’. In other words: different locations; different sites of performances; different relationships between actors and casual users; different forms of delivering and communicating within the theatrical event; different theatrical forms and content; and different ways of users relating to the institution of theatre are perceived to be ‘Contact-like’. It needs to be added, though, that casual users at the same time also appreciate ‘traditions’ in terms of solid craft, narrative and meaning. In other words, they appreciate features they recognise from the classic theatre (paradigm). Casual users seem to appreciate it, for example, when actors speak well, display good craft, when their costumes look good, when they sing well, dance well or move well. When performers improvise with casual users they like to feel that this serves a purpose and that this contributes to the ‘overall aim’ of the particular performance. Casual users appreciate it when performers are (in an assured way) in control when improvising with casual users. This control is accepted if it is
flexible and deals with casual users on an equal-basis. Brazen displays of power are mistrusted, however, if it comes in the form of commands and ‘herding’ casual users around.

The questionnaire interrogated the concept of ‘interactivity’ as one expression of a Contact-like performance quality. ‘Interactivity’ can be regarded as a ‘liminal factor’ compared with the ‘classic paradigm’. It is, therefore, interesting to look at how casual users responded to the interaction during the performances. How did the interaction make them feel? The relatively large number of responses (90+) represents a complex field of responses. One could, therefore, look at them as a spectrum. There is a rather broad middle ground of opinions in which casual users feel ‘fine’, ‘happy’ and ‘good’ about the interaction with the performers. Many casual users said that they ‘enjoyed’ the interaction and the direct involvement with the performance. Other cherished their involvement, in however a small way, in Glass Cases. This represents a majority of casual users who handed back their questionnaires. On the other end of the spectrum are those casual users who felt rather nervous about the interaction and the ‘negotiable’ relationship between casual users and performers. “Oh no!” was a fairly typical response, “they want me to participate” (BG 2011). Some casual users felt this way. It is interesting to observe, at the same time, however, that feelings of anticipation and nervousness were often combined with some form of enjoyment or acceptance of challenging circumstances. The first impulsive “Oh no!” of one casual user was on reflection often followed by “that became part of the performance” (BG 2011). Another participant said that he felt “under pressure” but that the “interactivity added to the enjoyment” at the same time (LP 2011).
Those responses, it seems to me are, above all, indicative of the unsettled position of a number of casual users. As the theatrical frame is a contemporary and alternative one, the behaviour of casual users during the performance is negotiable. Williams’ casual users are exposing themselves to challenging circumstances of an, in Williams words, ‘emerging culture’ (Williams 1977:123ff.).

Mainstream Repertory theatres: the frame of reference for casual users’ experiences

I am not used to being led around, I am used to going to the theatre and seeing a performance on a stage. (KD 2010)

The quotation of the respondent above might sound like a rather general comment. Read against Glass Cases it is, in fact, specific. This young man reveals that he is used to ‘sitting down’ in a theatre. He is accustomed to watching a performance happening in front of his eyes on a stage. Most follow-up interviewees stressed that they experienced Glass Cases as ‘different’. In the context of this investigation this means that their experiences were different from those provided by the ‘classic paradigm’. ‘Differences’ in experiences were often expressed strongly and repeatedly. However, it remained unclear what exactly they referred to. Casual users’ expressions of disappointment, on the other hand, offer a more detailed view of their expectations. Whenever respondents articulate that their expectations were not met, they – in turn – communicate what they expected to happen. They reveal, in other words, that most of their expectations have been formed and developed by activities commonly related to mainstream repertory theatres and the ‘classic paradigm’. The ‘classic paradigm’ is, therefore, often the

105 Williams here describes cultural tendencies as being either ‘emerging,’ ‘dominant’ or ‘residual’.
frame of reference for casual users’ expectations of Contact and its performances. Contact is a participatory youth theatre. However, few people know what to expect from performances or events taking place in a participatory youth theatre. This means that the mainstream repertory theatre remains a first port of call for many casual users – despite fundamental differences between itself and a participatory youth theatre. If casual users are in need of orientation they refer back to their experiences or knowledge of mainstream repertory theatres.

There are at least three areas in which casual users’ expectations are informed by mainstream repertory theatres: firstly, by audience’s physical space; secondly, by qualities of the performance script; thirdly, by relationships and, fourthly, by interactivity between those involved. I am now going to look at each in turn.

Casual users’ physical space
First, casual users’ experiences are often informed by the characteristics of the space which audiences usually inhabit in mainstream repertory theatres. Generally speaking, audiences buy a ticket for a ‘seat’ and sit on this seat to watch the performance. This ‘seat’ gives them (in the majority of cases) unobstructed visual and auditory access to the performance. A ‘cheap seat’ is often far away from the stage and provides an adequate access to visual and auditory observation. A good seat, on the other hand, provides a better view because it is either closer to the stage (stalls) or it is elevated (dress circle). A seat affords audiences of mainstream repertory theatres at least one arm rest and guarantees a minimum of personal space including a seating area, a backrest and some personal legroom. It
is one of the tacit agreements in Western mainstream repertory theatre that the act of buying a ticket makes this seat ‘personal’ for the duration of the performance. Audience members buy a right to a ‘personal’ space which, in turn needs to remain free from interferences to sight and auditory stimulation.

Promenade performances, on the other hand, extend the contract between performers and spectators and oblige the latter to move from ‘stage’ to ‘stage’. The Scottish Arts Council defines what makes ‘promenade’ different:

In Promenade the staging or performance area may be set in various locations in a venue. There may even be no distinction between the area the [casual users] sit or stand in and the space for action. The [casual users] inhabit, not just watch, a space. They must change their focus, move to watch the action or even interact or ‘mingle’ with the cast and action.

*Glass Cases* is set inside the Manchester Museum. The CYAC performers often found the inspiration for their performances in intimate places. Only the opening scene (Foyer) and the last scene (Mammal Gallery) are set in big spaces. All other scenes happen in relatively small spaces. For example, the second scene, a story about a ‘bag lady’, takes place on a landing between two flights of stairs, which connect the foyer with the galleries on the first floor. The ‘stage’ is a one of the smallest spaces of *Glass Cases* and can accommodate roughly 20 people. A maximum of 20 people was, therefore, allowed for each performance. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, a large number of museum visitors spontaneously joined the very first group of casual users on their way from the foyer to the first floor. The museum visitors who happened to be in the foyer when the guards/clowns started to speak responded to the unfolding promenade performance by eagerly and closely following the performers. This meant that instead of 20 people, 40 or more people were following the guards/clowns up the
stairs. Many casual users assumed, as would be that case in mainstream repertory theatres, that a ticket (even one free of charge) guarantees them a place of visual and auditory access. A number of casual users, therefore, tried to avoid the rush created by museum visitors and took their time and casually followed the performers. This, in turn, led to a situation which saw visitors (without tickets) occupy the space close to the ‘bag lady’. Many casual users, however, were left stranded at the bottom on the stairs unable to see or hear the ‘bag lady’ properly. This situation created a tension which was reflected in many respondents comments in the questionnaires and the in the follow-on interviews. This issue was later partially addressed by giving out wristbands for casual users. However, access to a promenade performance inside in a museum is almost impossible to supervise satisfactorily and compromises had to be made.

Through its dynamic promenade format Glass Cases could not guarantee places from which casual users could see and hear in an undisturbed way nor guarantee personal space for each of its casual users. Respondents had to adapt to emerging situations and make an effort to safeguard visual and auditory access. One respondent commented on this by saying that Glass Cases made casual users responsible for “find[ing] a good spot for yourself where you can see, hear and be comfortable” (BG 2011). Her comment reveals that it was rare that casual users were able to effortlessly see, hear and, at the same time, be comfortable. Since the performance moved from big to small spaces, from floor to floor, into corners, landings and corridors – and performers additionally moved in and among the crowd, casual users had to either make active attempts to stay close to the performers or be content with some restrictions to their seeing, hearing and their
personal comfort. Some casual users felt that *Glass Cases* infringed upon their right to uninhibited access to the performance at all times:

I could not hear in some spaces, which was frustrating. \(\text{(LP 2010)}\)

Or, more specifically, the same respondent reflected on her experiences of the ‘bag lady’ scene on the landing of the stairs:

The ‘bag lady’: totally negative. I could not see it. … I was standing at the bottom of the stairs. It was crowded. I couldn’t see or hear what the ‘bag lady’ was saying. \(\text{(LP 2010)}\)

From the above it can be seen that casual users experienced the movement and the physical space of *Glass Cases* differently to performances conforming to the ‘classic paradigm’ in mainstream repertory theatre. For some this was a source of frustration, especially if casual users were hesitant to adapt to different circumstances. For others, however, movement and a different physical environment added excitement and made the experience of the performance and the museum richer. One respondent even remarked with regard to the new-found joy of promenade: The performance made me wonder how I will react to sitting in a theatre now (BG 2011).

**Qualities of the performance experiences**

Secondly, what can audiences of mainstream repertory theatre performances expect to experience in a performance? In Western theatre it has become one of the main occupations for audiences to look for ‘meaning’. Meaning can be located in the performance text, in the way the text is performed or also in the way in which one interpretation of the performance (text) differs from another. One of the main helpers to audiences in the meaning making processes is the structure of the narrative or the underlying performance text. This means that audiences can
expect that the order of scenes represents a certain development or progression in
the narrative or in the progress of the characters. *Glass Cases*, on the other hand,
has at least in some ways, diverted from this practice. Although there is a
‘structure’ to the performance, there is little sense of development or progression
towards closure.

There was no linear narrative. It ended and no one was sure if it had ended.
... It was so transient... When it ended, there was the potential for
something else to happen. (LP 2011)

*Glass Cases* invited casual users to reflect and to mentally ‘play with’ its parts.
Casual users could, for example, re-assemble scenes in a different order to get
closer to a preferred interpretation. Apart from the opening and closing scene, all
other vignettes could have been re-ordered in numerous ways. Instead of
‘meaning making’ in pre-determined ways casual users were asked to think, reflect
and, maybe, draw their own conclusions. One casual user expressed it this way:

Normally, when you watch a play ... it tends to be in order. This [*Glass
Cases*] was more about thinking about each separate part and how it fitted
together. If you see something on the stage [of a mainstream repertory
theatre] you would pick out the important bits. With [*Glass Cases*] you were
looking at each individual bit and trying to see how it linked with the next.
(BG 2011)

It can, thereby, be seen that the unusual structure of *Glass Cases* gave casual users
reason to become involved in the construction of the performance in different
ways compared with performances complying with the ‘classic paradigm’. Casual
users could watch the performance as they would elsewhere. However, they could
also take on more responsibilities for the performance, reflect upon it and co-
construct it in their very own way.
Relationships

Thirdly, relationships between casual users were experienced as different in *Glass Cases*. Here, again, we have to ask what those experiences are different from. Relationships between participants in performances conforming to the ‘classic paradigm’ are characterised by a certain ‘formality’. This formality has been established as a ‘norm’, especially between experienced, grown-up audiences. This norm involves a formal way of clothing, a formal way of behaviour inside the theatre – in the auditorium as much as in the foyer – and includes formal relationships between those who find themselves in seats next to each other. For theatre-goers experienced in the ‘classic paradigm’ one of the most important parts of a theatre performance (aesthetically and artistically) happens on the stage. The ‘performance’ is, for many audiences, the main reason why they go to the theatre. However, this concentration upon the stage is acquired over long periods of time. For young people – especially those who are new to live theatre – this is far from self-evident. For them, what happens in the auditorium is at least as important, if not more so, as what happens on stage.\(^{106}\) Formality has been established, accepted and is often seen as a kind ‘naturalised part’ of theatre-going for audiences versed in the ‘classic paradigm’. Theatres like Contact function in an informal way. This puts them at odds with the ‘formality’ which is seen, by some, as a fundamental part of theatre. The ‘informality’ in its setting, its programming and the relations between its users is noticed especially by those for whom theatre has been an equivalent of formality. One respondent expressed it in this way:

\(^{106}\) See also: (Reason 2006 (b); Reason 2006 (c); Reason 2010 (a); Reason 2010 (b))
I felt a lot closer to the [casual users] than I do when sitting in a traditional theatre. I felt like we were a group of friends/acquaintances who were all going on a journey.  

(KD 2010)

It can thus be seen that in Glass Cases casual users related to other casual users in different ways, compared with the ‘classic paradigm’. Different relationships, in turn, produce different experiences. Formal mainstream repertory theatre contexts produce formal experiences. A more informal setting, like Contact, creates more informal and ‘closer’ personal relationships. Formal audiences, used to the ‘classic paradigm’, theatres can, potentially, in more informal settings become ‘friends’.

**Interactivity**

Fourthly, most forms of interactivity between theatre-goers are generally discouraged in auditoria of theatres governed by the ‘classic paradigm’.  

Whereas both performers and audiences are part of the theatrical event a strict division of labour is mostly adhered to. Performers are mainly performing on a stage in front of audiences. Audiences, on the other hand, are encouraged to participate “intellectually, emotionally and spiritually” and to refrain from participating “physically and vocally” (Way 1981:2). In Glass Cases, however, interactivity – that is casual users’ participation in intellectual, emotional and spiritual as well as in physical and vocal ways – is one of the central elements of the performance. In Glass Cases interactions took place between casual users and performers and also between casual users and other casual users. For example, it has been already mentioned that casual users had to actively position themselves

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107 See also (Way 1981:2).
so that they could see and hear. Some of the time, the confined physical spaces of *Glass Cases* prevented casual users from hearing or seeing the performers. In mainstream repertory theatre this would have usually been a problem for single audience members as they could not speak to other audience members when the problem occurred. This was different during *Glass Cases*:

I really liked the way [casual users] interacted with one another. At one point we couldn’t hear what happened so we asked another [casual user] who explained it. From quite early on [casual users] developed a relationship with one another. (LP 2010)

Small physical spaces made it impossible for some causal users to hear everything which was said or done. This would normally lead to a loss of information for the person who could not hear. However, at *Glass Cases* this problem was overcome by different casual users cooperating with each other. Through their interaction casual users were able to overcome the obstacles and more fully experience the performance since they were able to draw on the resources of the group rather than solely rely on their own:

I engaged a lot with [casual users] in terms of eye contact. The way you moved around the space meant that you had to engage with other [casual users]. ... [You had to] let people past, ... say ’move forward’ or “I’ll bob down, can you see?”

[The interaction] added to the overall enjoyment of the piece, being ’part of something’. You were part of something so crazy and strange. You thought, ”what the hell’s going on”, but it didn’t matter because we were “all in it together”. (LP 2011)

The feeling of being ’part of something’ has been exciting for many respondents. It gave them the feeling not just to witness the *result* of other people’s work but being involved in the *process* of creation.
[The movement] made everything feel different and each time you entered another space you wondered what was going to happen. [I asked myself] ‘what are we going to do here?’ rather than ‘what are they going to do here?’ (BG 2011)

In the opening scene casual users were asked to assist in the search for a key. This ‘search’ invited casual users to play the part of ‘clue-hunters’. After the ‘frame’ of the search was made clear, the ‘search’ largely became the responsibility of the casual users. The performers invited interaction in a variety of planned and unplanned ways. Interactions were planned when they were part of the material the performers had rehearsed. However, in a promenade performance prepared scenes only make up one part of the overall time of the co-presence between casual users and performers. Performers and casual users have to re-negotiate their relationship continually. For example, when both moved from one scene to another, when they have arrived in one place and were waiting for the happening to start or when performers simply played the role of ushers to regulate the movement of the casual users and visitors. In each case the ‘script’ connecting people and places left it to the encounter between specific casual users and performers to what actually happened.

The first of those moments will be described here in some detail as this opening scene was important for the dramaturgy of the performance. It was also remembered by most respondents. However, there are many more such instances in Glass Cases. A few will be mentioned here: two performers separate some casual users for ‘deep cleaning’ and ‘de-dusting’ before they are allowed to join the rest of the group; a casual user either protects (disables access) or exposes (grants access) two dancing Neanderthal-women that are being pursued by the two
clowns/guards; two performers block the way of the casual users to the Egyptian section of the museum ‘in-character’; the casual users become a committee in front of which the performers demonstrate their ‘competence’ as guards of an important treasure; by clapping their hands the casual users start and stop a performer singing a song and, in the penultimate scene, a performer pleads to the casual users to help him flee.

The performance began when two guards/clowns marched down from the first level to the ground floor level foyer. They call for the casual users to come closer so that they could hear their announcement. The guards/clowns instructed the casual users that an important key has gone missing and that their cooperation in the search would be greatly appreciated. At the same time the guards/clowns warned that they are about to enter ‘the system’ in a few moments and would, therefore, have to follow the rules of the system without questioning or opposing them. Harsh punishment would be meted out on non-compliance. In later performances the two guards/clowns attempted to separate members of one group from the other as best as their characters would allow them to.

After this ‘induction’ by the two guards/clowns on the ground floor foyer audiences were lead to a plateau between two flights of stairs. Here, a barrier stopped audiences. It was manned by two guards who wore the same, distinct uniforms worn by the guards/clowns. On this plateau audiences were greeted by a female character (played by an African-Caribbean actress). She stood in a corner next to a pile of boxes and suitcases. This ‘bag lady’ explained that she felt ‘excluded’ from the museum and that she kept coming back time and again. She intimated that the guards ‘did not like her’ and, therefore, always prevented her from entering. She, on the other hand, felt that she is surely more interesting than animal skeletons and, therefore, ‘deserved her own section in the museum’. She made casual users huddle around – to prevent the nearby guards from eavesdropping – and asked who would smuggle a letter and a (lavish) hat past the guards. She explained that she needed help, the guards, who were part of the system, would otherwise keep her out forever. The ‘bag lady’ read her letter, which was addressed to the people in charge of the museum. She then passed the letter and the hat to the casual user who agreed to smuggle them. The casual user had to step forward to the barrier. As soon as the guards noticed the casual user wanting to pass through (s)he was ‘interrogated’. The guards made the casual users empty her pockets and produce keys and any ‘incriminating evidence’ before allowing her to proceed into the museum. In the course of the interrogation of the casual user the ‘bag lady’ would, with cunning and a big wail, slip through the barrier. She ran to the next floor of the museum and vanished immediately. Now the guards opened the barrier for all other casual users. A few casual users were held back for deep ‘cleaning’ or ‘de-dusting’ before they could proceed onto the next level of the museum.
Throughout the performance casual users were able to influence what and how some scenes would happen. They were able to influence the actions of the performers, for example the guards/clowns in the vault, the interactive installations in the corridor, the ‘living portrait’ in the Mediterranean section and the curator in the Mammal gallery.

Conclusion

The first part of this chapter has shown that casual users perceive Contact as different from the ‘classic paradigm’ and mainstream repertory theatre. However, very few people have experiences outside of this frame. Therefore, Contact – despite its differences in its set up, way of operation and programming – is generally compared against mainstream repertory theatres. ‘Theatre’ acts as a kind of umbrella term which is understood by many, which has come to mean conditions, content and relations compliant with the ‘classic paradigm’. The flip side of the use of the term in such a way is that differences between mainstream repertory theatres and other theatres are rarely appreciated fully. Casual users’ feedback has shown that Contact’s atmosphere, building, programming and space taken together, are perceived to be different from mainstream repertory theatres. Due to a lack of alternative models, however, Contact is associated with what it most closely resembles for its casual users: a theatre conforming to the ‘classic paradigm’. The perception of difference in casual users’ opinions has become more marked. In other words, casual users perceive Contact, in Kershaw’s words (2007), as a part of the same theatrical ecosystem. However, Contact’s

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109 It has to be kept in mind, though that the perception of Contact is closely connected to the way audiences conventionally perceive traditional theatres, what they are to them and what theatres traditionally ask of their patrons.
development out of its classic habitat into an alternative ecosystem is acknowledged by highlighting the differences between Contact and mainstream repertory theatres.

What do the sub-categories: atmosphere, building, programming and space share with each other? In other words, what do they, point towards? It could be argued that the experiences Contact provides are the sum total of those sub-categories. Although expectations are immensely important for causal users’ experiences, they are missing in the above list. Many expectations are ‘second nature’ and, thereby, have become invisible. Most casual users have a limited awareness of what they expect from a theatre and why. To ask casual users explicitly and systematically about their expectations needs to be the task of future research.

Casual users appreciate it when the boundaries of traditional theatre practises are pushed in terms of the ‘classic paradigm’, in terms of interactions between casual users and performers, where performances takes place, what theatre re-presents and how it represents itself. At the same time, casual users really appreciate good, solid, traditional theatre craft, recognisable scenarios (narratives, and elements of theatre which make meaning) and when they can see and hear what is going on during a performance. They appreciate it to be in new, different and even challenging environments. However, they also like their own view and earshot to be as unobstructed as if they were sitting in a traditional theatre auditorium. Mainstream repertory theatres’ audiences buy a ticket for a seat which guarantees unobstructed hearing, seeing and a certain level of personal

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110 I would argue that expectations play a much bigger role in audiences’ experiences than they are presently accredited with. At the same time I acknowledge the difficulties in researching audiences’ expectations.
comfort. Spectators only become fully aware of those ‘naturalised’ expectations of seeing, hearing and comfort when they cannot be fully secured.

Contact users seem to like traditional forms of theatre enough to appreciate and cherish the institution as a whole. However, they also seem to appreciate more than just ‘a taste of difference’ to established norms and practices. Casual users have developed an appetite for alternative and emerging cultural practices. Contact users like ‘differences’ in terms of the narrative, character, genre and context of the theatrical event. However, they also appreciate when they are able to recognise elements of what is represented and when they are able to make meaning and connections, in whatever way. Contact users like both, theatrical craft, and the differences in ideas, relationships and execution. The data suggests that casual users’ idea of an ‘ideal’ Contact performance could be conceptualised thus: it is a challenging performance which has somewhat recognisable structures, narratives and which is performed in different places and which allows different relationships between the participants in the theatrical event to come to the fore. There also seems to be a desire to see innovation when it is still in its infancy.

Contact users have developed a taste for differences between traditional ways of ‘theatre going’ and engaging with performances in alternative ways. They appreciate it when theatrical events involve them in different ways. They like to experience different performance and presentation styles, different performance spaces and also different ways in which they relate to or cooperate with the performers. Challenging new ideas need to be in balance with a need of an ‘idea’ of what is going on. Casual users expressed a view that they want change and want to be included in it. In other words they want to feel that they are connected with a movement which is challenging the ‘classic paradigm’.
Casual users, however, are willing to question their own role within the traditional theatre set up, too. They are willing to try out different ways of relating to performers, performances and the theatrical event as a whole. Contact users appreciate ‘difference’. This, in a way, is why many of them frequent Contact. The difference, however, should ideally be manageable. Contact users, in other words, want to be able to appreciate difference. They like change which allows them to relate to it in ways they are used to. The difference should be big enough that it represents a challenge or something ‘different’ to traditional theatre practices. Should the ‘status quo’ be challenging, however, Contact users appreciate it when they find some familiarity within ‘the alternative’, new and ‘the unseen’.

That many of Contact users in *Glass Cases* felt at home with the interactive nature of the performance might at least be partly explained with the high number of young and middle-aged people taking part. However, the metaphor of a scale seems to me an apt way to refer to Contact users. They, arguably, want to strike a balance between the challenges they encounter at Contact and the ways of relating which they practiced in the past. Casual users wish to be challenged, more challenged than audiences in many other theatres in the UK. Through many innovative performance formats Contact users are forced to readjust and continually question their own position within the framework of theatrical events. With a number of performances Contact users have to reposition themselves in view of their own role within this specific set up. At Contact everything is flexible and informal, users are engaged in ‘making’ or ‘co-constructing’ their positions, of creating the very situation they want to be in.

7.3 **Evaluation of Research Methods**
7.3.1 Short, qualitative (snapshot) interviews

The problem under investigation properly dictates the method of investigation. (Trow 1957:33)

Short (‘snapshot’) interviews have, as any other research method, strengths and weaknesses. Their strengths have been elaborated earlier. This is now the place to reflect back on the use of this particular method within this study. How productive have short (snapshot) interviews been in contributing to the argument of this thesis? Conducting qualitative interviews about general features of Contact is challenging, as they often have an ephemeral/ episodic character. It is easier to study regular phenomena like, for example, eating habits (compare: Beardsworth and Keil 1992). Although theatre-going might be a regular part of many casual users’ lives it can be safely considered to be a weekly, monthly or yearly (rather than daily) routine. It is an additional difficulty that the phenomenon under study, the opinion of Contact’s casual users about their host, is often in an emerging state. Impressions of the building, the organisation, its programming and other casual users often depend on the time a casual user has been exposed to them. The more often a casual user experiences Contact, often in a variety of roles, the more familiar will the building, the organisation, its programming and other casual users become. Over time, impressions lose their intensity, especially when casual users only talk about Contact. This makes it hard to gain a fair view of Contact which is sensitive to why users mention any particular feature because opinions depend on casual users’ previous experiences of Contact. Phenomena which are considered to be ‘different’ might be mentioned most by users for whom they are, indeed, unfamiliar compared with other experiences or knowledge. The novelty of the same phenomenon might have worn thin on somebody who knows Contact better.
A more regular casual user might, therefore, not mention a particular feature in the interview. Future interviews should take account of this fact and routinely inquire about the grade of familiarity of interview respondents with Contact. This would ensure more accurate research results. It is a considerable advantage compared with participant observation that short video interviews are able to reconstruct events which began before research started. It is also an advantage that they are able to explore phenomena which the researcher does not or only restricted access to, such as private conversations among friends or, on a more extreme end of the spectrum, a visit to a toilet. Short (‘snapshot’) interviews are less intrusive in people’s (busy professional) lives, as they take up a minimal amount of time. The short time between the theatrical event and the interview means that interviewees’ impressions are still fresh. It is also a relatively inexpensive method to collect research material. This method is especially suited for capturing general impressions. Following up interviews on several occasions is likely to be easier than returning to research sites on a regular basis (Bryman 2012:496).

Summarising, it can be said that it is the strength of short interviews that they allow access to a wide variety of users (Bryman 2012:496).

The weaknesses of the method, however, are considerable. Short interviews need some significant investment in terms of funds and time from the researcher. Although the initial investment of researcher and interviewee is minimal, the interviews need to be transcribed. Once the transcription is done it became apparent that this method is heavily reliant on words. Once recorded video interviews are, in effect, treated in the same way as audio-recorded interviews. Although cameras record a rich amount of research material only the textual level has been used. The images have rarely influenced advanced stages of
research. The short time which has elapsed between event and interview means that there is hardly any time for interviewees to reflect. ‘First impressions’, however, might be fed by circumstances which, in the long run, might be less important. Short interviews are less productive to garner responses to specific and complex questions.

### 7.3.2 Questionnaire and follow-on telephone interviews

Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) argue that few differences can be found in response to qualitative interviews conducted face-to-face or by telephone. In contrast, Irvine et al. (2010) argue that respondents of face-to-face interviews tend to talk for longer. They also argue that a researcher in interviews of this kind was more likely to leave questions unfinished and to give more vocalised responses to show that they had understood (‘yeah’ and ‘mm hm’). In face-to-face interviews questions were also more likely to be grammatically incorrect. For this study it could be noted that all respondents who declared that they would be happy to take part in a later telephone interview had access to a telephone. This is unsurprising, since it has become customary that most people in the United Kingdom have access to a landline and also a mobile telephone. Telephone interviews are, according to Bryman (2012), less likely to go well with long interviews. This could not be confirmed in this enquiry. Telephone interviews ranged from 15 to more than 65 minutes. The length of the conversation has not come up as a problem. It has to be said, though, that very long telephone interviews can test the limits of physical comfort of both the researcher and the respondent. It has been noticed as a disadvantage that the body language of the respondents could not be observed. This could have help to qualify some responses further. Since Contact provided access to a hands-free telephone in one of their offices, there was no need for
special recording equipment. The conversation could be heard over the speaker and would be documented with a voice recorder. However, the fact that all telephone interviews needed to be conducted during normal office hours created some tension between me and the occupants of neighbouring desks. Hands-free conversations conducted in an open-plan office gave co-workers little choice but to listen to both sides of the conversation for the entire duration of the interview. Although co-workers were supportive, I felt that this recording technique intruded on co-workers ‘auditory space’. This situation was partly addressed by using empty offices whenever possible. The invasion of co-workers’ space created a focus on finishing telephone interviews as quickly as possible. This was in conflict with a desire to continue the conversation with respondents until the best possible answer was given. The conversation with respondents – despite its sometimes considerable length – may have, at times, been rushed and thereby influenced the quality and outcome of some telephone interviews.

Telephone interviews have been an effective tool for this study as time and travel costs could be saved. They have also proved to be a useful method as respondents live dispersed within Greater Manchester and Cheshire. It may be that asking sensitive questions by telephone is “more effective, since interviewees may be less distressed about answering when the interviewer is not physically present” (Bryman 2012:488).

It was noticed that only respondents who have a personal relationship to CYAC, Contact, Contact’s partner organisations or the researcher made themselves available for follow-on interviews. In contrast, none of the respondents who declared in the initial questionnaire that they are happy to take part in a telephone conversation could be reached for an interview. A conscientious researcher is
likely to wish to reverse such a situation and draw more on ‘outsiders’ opinions and less on ‘insiders’. This could be achieved by a very careful formulation of the response section of the questionnaire and by, additionally, incentivising outsiders to make themselves available. Non-monetary or inexpensive rewards – for example, back stage tours through Contact or complimentary tickets for a Contact performance – have the potential to make respondents wish to honour an initial declaration of interest.

The term ‘reactive measurement effects’, according to Webb et. al. (1966:13), refers to a “research subject’s knowledge that he is participating in a scholarly search [and that this] may confound the investigator’s data” (Bryman 2012:280). Webb et. al. distinguish between four different parts of this effect: firstly, the ‘guinea pig effect’; secondly, the ‘role selection’; thirdly, the ‘measurement as a change agent’ and fourthly, the ‘response sets’. Bryman additionally suggests that the “unnatural character of the interview encounter can also be regarded as a context within which reactive effects may emerge” (2012:496). As the first three effects occurred in this study, they will be shortly explained. The ‘guinea pig effect’ refers to respondents’ awareness that they are being ‘tested’. They want to create ‘a good impression’ and, therefore, behave in unusual ways. Through ‘role selection’ Webb et. al. direct attention to research participants who may seek out cues about the aim of the research and adjust their responses in line with their perceptions. The ‘measurement as a change agent’ refers to the effect a researchers’ presence may have in circumstances in which normally no researcher is present. The very fact that a researcher is physically present may cause change in the circumstances which are being observed. All three effects played a smaller or bigger part of this investigation. However, it is
impossible for a study of Contact's users to work with unobtrusive measures or non-reactive methods as Webb et. al. recommend. Such methods do not involve participants' knowledge of their involvement in research such as working with physical traces, archive material, simple observation or contrived observation (Webb 1966:112). What can be done in the current context is to be conscious and open about the effects of obtrusive measures and reactive methods for the research.

This chapter has addressed casual users' experiences of Contact as a venue and their long-term experiences of a Glass Cases. An innovative and also an established method are experimented with to see if they can deliver insights into casual users' practices which digress from the 'classic paradigm'. It could be established that innovative and established methods can both contribute to the research of such practices.
The research on Contact audiences (redefined as ‘users’) led to a new understanding of what Contact is fundamentally about. It defined Contact’s role as providing a ‘virtual experiential space’ for young people in which they can go on different ‘journeys’. This ‘virtual experiential space’ is independent of Contact’s building and travels with long-term and casual users. It enables young people to take up different roles in a theatre and to make different experiences. Some young people can take on the ‘role’ of a professional performer, write a play, lead workshops, direct a performance, work as technician, market a performance or produce a theatre festival. Others create new roles and become a spoken-word or hip-hop artist or a ‘theatrician’. In the process of trying out different roles many of Contact’s long-term users become emerging artists. More importantly, perhaps, young people learn to take leadership in all aspects of performance making and are encouraged to take creative risks and adopt experimentation in their work (McGrath 2007). When young people take up different roles and make different experiences, they go on ‘journeys’. These journeys are almost always unique, as they are mainly determined by their interests, in conjunction with the programmes and personnel available. Contact provides this ‘virtual experiential space’ for young people’s journeys and, at the same time, allows them to join ‘communities of practice’ of like-minded people. The research has found that this ‘virtual experiential space’ is the ‘core’ of Contact.

The research, thereby, provides Contact with a conceptual framework and a language for reflecting on its practice and for taking it forward. In this sense the
thesis has gone beyond devising new methods for researching audiences to proposing new ways for Contact to reflect on, articulate, and develop the ethos underlying its practices, which is at the core of its users' experiences.

This leads us back to the beginning and the quest for audience research methods. As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis has its beginning in a conversation between two academics and the artistic director of Contact Theatre in the years 2005/06. They had noticed that existing audience research methods suited mainstream repertory theatres but not Contact. It was clear to them that Contact’s audiences were different from those in mainstream repertory theatres, and therefore these three people felt that new methods were needed. Such methods would help Contact to better understand its audiences, who could not be reached and questioned in the same way as audiences of mainstream repertory theatres. In 2008, the search for new audience research methods started as a collaborative PhD between the University of Manchester and Contact.

Fast forward to the year 2012: on 20th September, the results of this research project were presented to Contact’s board. In a conversation after the presentation between one of the initiators and the writer of this study it was recognised that the outcomes of the study were, in fact, different from those which had been anticipated. On the one hand, the thesis did introduce and experiment with new audience research methods. However, in its course, it had shifted in unforeseen ways. The search for Contact’s ‘core’, and the specifics of the people who go there, had become a second and powerful driver. The initial emphasis on ‘methods’ slowly shifted to a search for Contact’s ‘core’. In time, the latter dominated the research as it posed a fundamental question without which the former is largely without meaning.
As highlighted in chapter one, the development within this study was accompanied by at least two fundamental changes in its economic and cultural context. First, the economic climate in the UK, as all over the world, changed drastically due to the Global Financial Crisis in 2008. The Arts Council England responded to this development and changed some of its priorities. It concentrated its capacities on organisations which were considered important for a National Portfolio and also made some other alterations. This changed the funding climate for the arts in the UK and also impacted on Contact. Second, spurred on by a much more competitive climate for arts funding, a change of thinking was beginning to emerge among Contact staff and its board, in regard to the evaluation of its work. Almost imperceptibly, qualitative thinking had made its way into evaluation processes, which had traditionally been dominated by quantitative characteristics. It had been recognised that established ways of evaluating Contact’s work, in order to justify and apply for new funding, was mostly ‘quantifying’ peripheral activities rather than Contact’s core participative activities. Numbers of audiences and people who had taken part in Contact’s programmes were traditionally seen as a way to assess whether public subsidies had been well spent. However, dissatisfaction with these established ways of evaluation led Contact’s Creative Development team to seek for creative and qualitative ways to account for young people’s activities. In 2011, they commissioned a computer programme in order to track and represent young people’s journeys, as well as their experiences.

These changes – in the economic and arts funding climate as well as the inclusion of qualitative thinking in evaluation processes at Contact – have run in parallel to this study. However, they also form the background to the shift in emphasis from ‘methods’ to users and, therefore, to Contact’s ‘core’. This study
makes it clear, then, that Contact differs in more ways from mainstream repertory theatres than had been recognised in the past.

Contact's position within Manchester's theatre ecology is less than secure today than it used to be in the past. Many strands of its work are copied by other theatres. For example, the Flip-the-Script format – developed at Contact – has been successfully adapted by many other theatres in the UK and also abroad. Since the funding climate for the arts in the UK has changed dramatically between 2005 and 2012, questions of attracting, securing and justifying funding have become ever more pressing for all arts organisations in the UK. In this climate a need has arisen to determine even more specifically what Contact is about and where it wants to go in the future. At this point in time – 2012 – Contact needs to rethink its position and practices and to begin to articulate aims and objectives for the coming ten to fifteen years for a ‘capital bid’ to the Arts Council England. This study’s findings about what Contact is fundamentally about are, therefore, topical and also valuable to the theatre; even if, perhaps, different to the utility the initiators of this study might have anticipated in 2005/6. Rather than concentrating solely on devising new audience research methods this investigation has contributed to an understanding of which parts of its business are at its heart and which are part of its periphery. In the board meeting, mentioned above, in which the results of this study were presented, one board member said that the research is:

even more valuable [for Contact] than you [the writer] thought.  

(Gröschel 2012)

He stressed that the argument of this study provides Contact with:

the narrative for our ‘capital bid’ for the future.  

(ibid.)
In 2005/6 the initiators of the project had utility in mind when they set out to find methods with which to reach and question audiences at Contact in the same way as they can be reached and questioned in mainstream repertory theatres. The basis for such a quest is the assumption that Contact is comparable with mainstream repertory theatres and, therefore, the people who go through Contact’s doors are comparable to audiences in mainstream repertory theatres. This study has established, however, that Contact’s ‘core’ business operates in another paradigm and that its users are different from audiences in mainstream repertory theatres. Although it can be said that Contacts’ ‘core’ business is outside of the ‘classic paradigm’, it is difficult to say which paradigm their participative work fits into. This ‘other’ paradigm – if it is a performance paradigm, a contemporary theatre paradigm or a participative paradigm – is, to date, largely unknown. This paradigm will need to be studied in the future. It needs to be investigated in organisations like Contact for whom the distribution of labour of the ‘classic paradigm’ remains a suggestion and a process rather than a law and a result. Now that we know that Contact and its users deviate from the ‘classic paradigm’ we need to devise methods which are able to investigate their new qualities. In effect, the investigation has come full circle. It started with a search for methods which could be used to investigate Contact’s young and diverse audiences. The new methods were meant to operate within the ‘classic paradigm’. Instead of only addressing ‘methods’, the study established that Contact and its users are ‘different’ and are outside of the ‘classic paradigm’. Established methods are only partly able to deal with Contact’s users. Now that it has come to light that Contact and its users are different, there is a need for methods which are able to deal with
flexible distributions of labour, multiple roles and experiences which differ from
the ‘classic paradigm’.

8.1 Contact users and their practices

This study found that the people who go through Contact’s door differ from
audiences in mainstream repertory theatres. Audiences tend to come back to
theatres ‘in the same role’. Contact, however, provides a virtual experiential
‘space’ in which long-term users can experiment with their roles within the
theatre. By changing their roles, long-term users do not ‘fit’ the ‘classic paradigm’,
which assumes a strict distribution of labour between audiences, performers and
theatre makers. In terms of the ‘classic paradigm’, audiences are those who come
to witness performances in mainly established theatre buildings, performers play
roles on a stage and theatre makers are creatives who make artistic decisions.

This study looked at users’ new practices. While it was dealing with some
practices it engaged with questions about what Contact is, what its special features
are, what the object of the study is and how it could be defined. It could be the task
for future research to look at Contact’s long-term and casual users and to find
methods to research each of them in particular.

Contact users are a ‘breed’ of young people who are no longer content with
‘playing a role’ in the theatre which grown-ups predetermine for them. Instead,
Contact favours maximalist participation, in which participation does not only
mean access or interaction, but co-deciding or independent decision making
(Carpentier 2012).

Nonetheless, the initial aims of the young people upon entering Contact are
often defined by established ideas of theatre. Many of them are trying to fit in and
play ‘a role’ in artistic creations of other practitioners. After gaining personal
experiences of creative theatre practice and joining a creative community almost
all long-term users outgrow their initial aims and start to actively seek out other,
often unknown, paths. Contact’s long-term users can be seen to grow in their own
creative practices, to appreciate other artistic practices, and to engage with other
contemporary artistic practitioners. They are becoming induced to routinely
questioning established theatre conventions by experimentation and by
developing alternatives which chime with young peoples’ ideas and preferences
(see also: McGrath 2007). Young people’s creative practice often leads them to
formulate their own questions in relation to artistic formats, in addition to their
own questions about the world. With time, young people become increasingly
confident and assured about their artistic choices. The transition from mere
executors of artistic choices of others to becoming critical practitioners, who make
independent artistic choices in wide-ranging ways, has been one of the key
findings in this study. It is important to highlight that users are involved in all
areas of theatre making, not only performing. Projects initiated and led by young
people are one of the key aspects of Contact’s work.

Young people who come to Contact initially often wish to become actors and
actresses. The ideal is to ‘fit in’ and to ‘play a role’ within established, and mostly
mainstream, cultural frameworks. However, once young people have been with
Contact for a longer time their ambitions change. Instead of becoming ‘actors’
young people transform into creative practitioners. Many become workshop
leaders and artists in their own right. Additionally, some become engaged in
creative consulting or mentoring other young people and emerging artists. Some
of Contact’s long-term users worked as ‘cultural ambassadors’ for Contact in a
variety of ways. Most of Contact’s long-term users develop beyond the confines of established theatre roles and models – their journeys can be likened to a metamorphosis. They began to critically engage with their preferred art form in parallel with an engagement with others.

8.2 Remaining questions and future Audience Research

This study has argued that Contact’s users do not fit the ‘classic paradigm’ and, therefore, new methods are needed to research their practice. It was able to demonstrate that Contact users’ practices – including their roles and experiences – differ from those of audiences in mainstream repertory theatres, who comply with the ‘classic paradigm’. This study was also able to demonstrate that creative methods, in combination with some established research methods, are able to tackle some of the practices of Contact’s users successfully.

Throughout this thesis it has been argued that Contact’s long-term and casual users are using their mental and social horizons, their past experiences and subsequent expectations to ‘frame’ their experiences of specific theatrical events.

This research project found that there is a lack of methods which are able to deal with theatre goers outside of the ‘classic paradigm’, particularly for users who might play more than one role.

This study has explored Contact and its users. It has given us an understanding of which roles Contact’s users play and how their experiences can differ from those of mainstream repertory audiences. This research, however, has also raised new questions which future investigations might clarify. It has become clear that Contact’s ‘core’ is a ‘virtual experiential space’ which enables its users to play multiple roles. That young people play multiple roles means that they go on
‘journeys’. So far, research methods have difficulties dealing with multiple roles, with users’ multiple experiences and with a ‘virtual, experiential spaces’. Future research might address this.

Contact can, thereby, be seen as working outside of the ‘classic paradigm’. The field of audience research is, to an extent, reflecting the controversies and power struggles of the field of Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies specifically, and of the Humanities more generally. Few theatre audience researchers have the crucial skills to collect, analyse and interpret ‘live data’ from ‘real’ people. This lack of skills and awareness of methods in the discipline has kept researchers from researching ‘real’ people (Balme 2010). After all, even the novice can usually quite quickly establish that dealing with ‘real’ people is more challenging than dealing with experts’ statements. The performing arts and the social sciences, generally speaking, seem to have only occasionally developed an interest in closer cooperation in terms of the methods they use. Few drama scholars have been trained in social sciences methods. Social science approaches, however, could help researchers from Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies.

Methods, methodologies and models embraced in audience research in the theatre are mostly based on the ‘classic paradigm’. So much so, that this paradigm dominates the thinking in this field almost completely. This raises the question of how emerging practices outside of the established paradigm can be researched. It is necessary that multidisciplinary approaches are more widely propagated and used in Drama, Theatre, and Performance Studies. Audience research in the theatre needs to engage more with audience practices as they emerge, rather than applying established models to them. The methods and models available to social scientists might be a first port of call for audience researchers from Drama,
Theatre, and Performance Studies. It will, however, be the task of theatre audience researchers to find, develop and hone appropriate research strategies which are observant of both the specific paradigms and the social, cultural and economic environment of the people concerned.

Audience research, through a lack of language shared by most researchers working on or with it (Press 2006:95), would seem justified in calling for an interdisciplinary approach. It could also call for a discrete field, which, in its own right, would develop visions and a common language among researchers with different scientific backgrounds working on the same field.

Investigations of the general expectations of Contact's users in terms of the building and the organisation at large would also be of enormous value to the research community and Contact alike. Currently, little is known about the people who use Contact's building during the day and outside of events and who are not part of the user groups explored here. What are their backgrounds and what are those people expecting from the time they spend at Contact? The flow of patrons utilising some aspect of Contact for personal or professional reasons is currently largely untapped. That is to say that there is no clear idea of who comes to the building, how often, for how long and for which reasons. Contact wants to know who goes through its doors. This research project shows that it is important for theatres to be familiar with its users and their expectations. It is imperative to know how patrons relate to the structures, programmes, and working principles of specific theatres. It can be assumed that Contact's board, its management, as well as its staff and funders would welcome such information for the further development of Contact and its user communities.
This research has shown that studying a participatory youth theatre and its users is a complex undertaking. Emerging practices in producing, distributing and ‘consuming’ theatre call for fresh thinking and new approaches to theorising them. This thesis has set this process in motion by investigating what makes Contact different from mainstream repertory theatres and by exploring users’ roles, experiences and the methods to research them.
Appendices

Appendix A

Contact’s Mission Statement
Contact is a dynamic charity based in Manchester with young people at the heart of everything we do. We work locally, nationally and internationally to provide life changing opportunities for the next generation of creative leaders, artists and audiences. We redefine theatre for the 21st Century, presenting and producing a diverse artistic programme in our building, surprising places, and virtual spaces. (Contact 2011)

Contact’s four core ambitions:

INSPIRING PROGRESS - We will offer young people from a diverse range of communities, opportunities and support to progress through life changing journeys from participant to professional artist.

We provide opportunities for young people to explore and develop as artists. These journeys can begin with friends connecting in social spaces, drop in workshops, and in the focused development of Contact Young Actors Company (CYAC) and Future Fires. We are committed to engaging a diverse group of young people and providing opportunities that are free, accessible, and innovative.

Once our young people transition out of our projects and programmes they begin journeys as artists, facilitators and project managers often forming their own creative companies. In our consultations with young people the feedback was very clear that they need continued and sustained help in that transition.

GLOBALLY DIGITAL: We will use new technology in all of our art and communication, ensuring that anything we produce has local national and international reach the moment it is created.

Contact is uniquely placed as a venue with both strong local and international networks. We are also based in Manchester - a city with an ambitious cultural strategy and a focus on digital development and innovation.

The world is growing more connected via the multitude of web based information and media streams. We want our creative work to always be part of those streams, contributing to environmental sustainability, intercultural dialogue, and artistic experimentation.

We want our building to be alive with interactive possibilities using technology to assist in the creation of theatre, how we engage with young people, and how we communicate our cultural offer.
MANCHESTER TO THE WORLD: We will raise our profile so that everyone from every community knows who we are, where we are and the amazing work we do.

There is no venue in the world like Contact. Nowhere else brings together such a balanced offer of community connection, international development, young people centred engagement and leadership with high production values, professional productions, and truly experimental and bold practice.

It is essential that we shout loudly about the amazing work we create and present to local audiences across Greater Manchester but also to our National and International audiences who experience our cultural offer through touring and our online presence.

VITAL TO THE CREATIVE ECONOMY: We will work entrepreneurially to provide employment opportunities for young people and generate income so we can inspire progression and innovate artistically.

Contact has developed a strong core brand with values like experimentation, risk taking, creativity, and youth empowerment at its heart. We also create branded festivals like Contacting the World which has a massive international audience.
We are constantly creating new branded festivals and events like Queer Contact, Playspace, Verbally Challenged and RAW (Rhythm & Words) that can be commercialised to create revenue to support our core values and mission.

We develop talent and support the emergence of diverse groups of artists and facilitators. It is essential that we not only support the empowerment of these artists but that we benefit from our investment by creating mutually beneficial business opportunities for young people and the company through our Creative Consultants, facilitators, and schools programme.

(Contact 2011)
Appendix B

Questionnaire: *People in Glass Cases Shouldn’t Throw Stones* (please see following page)
Below is a questionnaire which we would really appreciate you filling in. We would be grateful if you could tick the box below to indicate you are happy for the answers to be used for research purposes. Overleaf is extra space for any additional comments.

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5. Are you happy for your answers to be used for research purposes? **YES** **NO**

6A Have you been to the Museum before?
No …… Once or twice …… Often ……

6B Have you seen a Contact show before?
No …… Once or twice …… Often ……

7. Why did you come to the museum today?
Specific exhibition ……
On holiday/Sight-seeing ……
Family day out ……
Educational visit/ research ……
To see the performance ……

8. Are you…
On your own ……
With family or friends ……
In an organised group ……

9. Did you pre-book a place for the performance piece today?
Yes …… No ……

10. Why did you decide to watch the performance piece?
Planned in advance ……
Was passing and it looked interesting ……
Have ‘done’ everything else ……
Other ………

11. What did you think of where the performance took place?
Suitable ……
Surprising ……
Exciting ……
Disappointing ……
[Additional comments] ……

12. Could you hear everything that was going on?
Yes…… Mostly …… Not Much …… No ……

13. Could you see everything that was going on?
Yes…… Mostly …… Not Much …… No ……

14. How did the performance impact on your impression of the museum?
Improved…… Worsened…… None at all ……

If yes, can you give examples? If no, why not?
……………………………………………

15. How did the performance make you feel?
Confused Happy Sad Surprised Inspired
Enlightened Angry Bored Engaged Tired

Comments …………
……………………………………………
……………………………………………

16. Did you interact with the performers at all?
Yes, a lot …… Yes, a bit …… Not at all ……

If yes, how did this make you feel? If no, why not?
……………………………………………
……………………………………………
……………………………………………

17. Were there any features of the performance which you particularly liked or disliked?
\[ \text{Liked} \] ………

\[ \text{Disliked} \] ………

If you have further comments please turn over
If you would be happy to take part in a telephone conversation at a later date, please enter your name and number below. [Optional].
Name ………
Tel ………
Appendix C

The role of diversity in building adaptive resilience

Tony Nwachukwu, burntprogress and
Mark Robinson, Thinking Practice
(commissioned by Arts Council England)

May, 2011

Contact Theatre, Manchester

Contact Theatre describes itself as a space where new kinds of theatre are
created. Its building, which benefited from a £5 million refurbishment in 1999,
includes three theatre spaces and a lounge area used for informal
performances and club nights.

Contact is characterised by an emphasis on participation, by its youth-focused
approach to decision-making and leadership and by how diversity runs right
through its work. Contact focuses on young adults (ages 13-30) and two-thirds
of its audiences are under 35. It does, however, welcome audiences and artists
of all ages. Young people were heavily involved in creating the new business
plan, through the Young People’s Panel, and through two places on the board
for young people. Young people are involved in all aspects of the organisation,
from top to bottom, from board membership to programming, hiring and
recruitment and even major tendering.

This results in unusually close relationships with the organisation, which create
informal and formal connections with theatre professionals, in order to support
independent career development for young people. Contact is increasingly
developing progression routes, such as the Friendly Fires scheme, where
young people lead participatory projects across Manchester, and providing
support to new companies so they can become independent.

Despite this emphasis on young people taking part, Contact does not have an
education department – indeed Chief Executive Baba Israel attributes the way
things work there to the absence of such a department. The Creative
Development team works to make sure young people are truly involved in all
aspects. Diversity of approach is essential here, with formal mechanisms, such
as a clear curriculum-based offer to schools and colleges, and informal or
organic relationships with community organisations. Open Contact is an open
day held every season, which enables young people and partners to find out
more about the organisation.

There is a diversity of arts practice within Contact – it is increasingly not just
theatre, but also music, visual arts, dance and spoken word. This is both a
natural outcome of the interests of the young people involved, and strategically
encouraged. An example is Pen-ultimate, a theatre group involving five spoken-
word artists who have developed into a touring company with support from Contact. The role of the theatre and more experienced people within it as mentors has been crucial.

Baba Israel, who joined Contact after moving from New York where he had been active as a hip-hop artist, poet, theatre maker and promoter, also has a background in interdisciplinary arts, and this creative hybridity is integral to the Contact approach. This is often allied to risk-taking, as when a resident DJ from a regular club night was invited to become part of the improvised theatre group. The spaces and people of the theatre thus become a real hub for cross-pollination.

This creative diversity then has a direct impact on the financial resilience of the organisation. Club nights have increased both bar revenue and awareness of the venue and its programme. Multiple strands of activity make diverse funding streams more likely in the future.

Diversity is also valued within the workforce, and explicitly encouraged. The organisation values not only formal education but also different life experience, and ensures training is given to staff who need particular support. The costs of this have been reduced by sharing skills internally, with staff training others in British Sign Language, for instance.

A strong lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in Manchester led to the creation of the Queer Contact festival, but it was important this community was not marginalised by only being engaged during the festival period, but was taken into account throughout programming for the whole season.

Inclusivity and the development of a collective learning experience influences how Contact works as well as what it does. Open platforms are created, rather than ones controlled entirely by professional staff within the theatre. An example is the move from a traditional script reading service to a more interactive process involving pitch sessions. The Flying Solo Festival adopted a methodology which began with an open call, but then provided development opportunities for eight artists, including mentoring from visiting artists, culminating in a pitch, where one was selected for full investment. The selection panel included industry experts and judging was done in public, so other artists learned from the process and audiences could begin to develop their own investment and interest in a project. This process actually saves time on script reading, while delivering arguably richer results.

Remaining challenges for Contact include building on its now very diverse core audience and ensuring that the offer also reaches school groups and older whiter audiences. This would have both creative and financial benefits given that older audiences tend to have more disposable income.
Appendix D

Participant Code Breakdown

CS1: Individual Interviews
[[CS1_II] Interviewed between 2009 and 2011]

AGF: Male, 26-39, lives in Manchester. Asian British, Artist and Youth Worker
BM: Male, 26-39, lives in Manchester. Asian British, Artist and Arts Facilitator
BMe: Male, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, Artist
BS: Male, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, Artist and University student
ES: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, Artist and Youth Worker
JMCG: Male, 40-59, lives in Cardiff, White British, Artistic Director
LE: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester and Sao Paulo (Brazil). White British, Artist
MJ: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, Comedian
MS: Male, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, Artist
NG: Male, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, Artist
NN: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester. African American, Artist
RB: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, Actress and Director
RMc: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, Arts Consultant
WL: Male 60-69, Lives in Manchester, African American, Actor and Director

CS2: Group Interview
[Contact, 08.05.2009]

AC: Male, 26-39, lives in Manchester. African American British, Arts Administrator
EH: Male, 10-18, lives in Manchester. White British, Artist and Spoken-Word Poet
AG: Female, 19-25, lives in Manchester. Asian British, TV Actress
BO: Male, 26-39, lives in Manchester. Asian British, Artist and Arts Facilitator

CS4: Longitudinal Study (Glass Cases at the Manchester Museum)
[4 week follow up interviews]

AI: Female, 19-25, lives in Manchester. Asian British, Apprentice
BG: Female, 39-60, lives in Cheshire, Teacher
BM: Male, 26-39, lives in Manchester. Asian British, Artist and Arts Facilitator
JL: Male, 19-25, lives in Manchester. Asian British, Writer and Performer
KD: Male, 26-39, lives in Manchester. African American British, Performer
KG: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, Actress
KP: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, Contact Staff
LG: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, Arts Administrator
LP: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, PhD Researcher
LPos: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, Theatre Education Director
MJ: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, Comedian
PB: Male, 29-25, lives in Manchester. White American, Arts Producer
RM: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, Arts Administrator
SS: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester. Asian British, Postgraduate student

Longitudinal Study (*Glass Cases* at the Manchester Museum)
[4 month follow up interviews]

BG: Female, 39-60, lives in Cheshire, Teacher
BM: Male, 26-39, lives in Manchester. Asian British, Artist and Arts Facilitator
JL: Male, 19-25, lives in Manchester. Asian British, Writer and Performer
KD: Male, 26-39, lives in Manchester. African American British, Performer
KP: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, Contact Staff
LG: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, Arts Administrator
LP: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, PhD Researcher
LPos: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, Theatre Education Director
PB: Male, 29-25, lives in Manchester. White American, Arts Producer
RM: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester. White British, Arts Administrator
SS: Female, 26-39, lives in Manchester. Asian British, Postgraduate student
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