

# **DURING AND ENDURING: FORCED ENTERTAINMENT'S *BLOODY MESS* AND THE MANIPULATION OF TIME IN PERFORMANCE**

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“They knew something strange had happened to time”  
Forced Entertainment, *A Decade of Forced Entertainment*

TIME IS THE MEDIUM THAT BRINGS ACT, actor and audience together in the fleeting moment of performance, and the time-bound interaction of bodies here, now, together is believed by Herbert Blau (1982, 83, 84, 290) and Peggy Phelan (1993, 146-9), among others, to be a basic ontological characteristic of performance. In this paper, I investigate the ways in which a performance's treatment of time is tied to its aesthetic and political impact. After a brief analysis of philosophical and performative approaches to time, I examine the experience produced by performances that do something strange to time—repeat, stretch, shrink, fracture and reframe a series of acts in time, prising performers and spectators out of the standard progression of things, and producing intensities of sensation that are articulable only by intellectual reduction as, in Blau's words, “you sit in the dark, thinking, the mind go[ing] back and forth in time, in and out of the play, as though through a topological manoeuvre” (1982, 6). I focus in particular on U.K. ensemble Forced Entertainment's manipulation of time in *Bloody Mess*, a show I first saw at the Malthouse Theatre in Melbourne, Australia, in October 2005 as part of the Melbourne International Arts Festival.

Over the course of their collaboration of more than twenty years, Forced Entertainment have consistently challenged the temporal structures that dominant Western drama, in the 1990s and 2000s coming to rely more and more on play, repetition and durational performance in which the risk of failure seems ever present. As my analysis of *Bloody Mess* will show, this approach produces a plethora of fragmentary images, narratives and interactions in Forced Entertainment's work, in which trajectories of thought and action collide, combine, mutate and disintegrate in seemingly random sequences, a randomness that reflects the character of contemporary existence. It pulls spectators into a series of confronting, exhilarating, exhausting, even boring relationships with the work, asking them to experience the relationship between act, actor, audience, story, space and time in new ways, without necessarily prescribing where this might lead.

**The Manipulation of Time**

Time, from a philosophical perspective, is the fragmented, multiplicitous force that pushes life forward, allowing us the possibility of movement, change, growth and transformation. It allows us to carry traces of the past through to the present—to anticipate, fear, remember and forget. It allows us to play ideas and behaviours out again and again, building them up, breaking them down. And yet, as Elizabeth Grosz has argued, it proves difficult to discuss time directly, in its own terms (2005, 1; 1999a, 2; 1999b, 17-18). Though the ‘nowness’ of time is every bit as perceptible as the ‘hereness’ of space (Grosz 1995, 98), philosophers, scientists and artists tend to speak of time only in terms of its impact on the bodies, spaces and societies with which it is always so intimately bound (Grosz 2005, 3, 4; 1995, 84, 92). Time itself remains, as Adrian Heathfield suggests, strangely unrepresentable (2000, 109). It offers, in Jacques Derrida’s terms, “nothing to see” (1993, 6). And so, Grosz suggests, “[t]ime is that which disappears as such in order to make appearance, all appearance and disappearance, that is, events, possible” (1999a, 1). Because time disappears into the events in space it makes possible, it remains unrepresentable in most Western philosophical and scientific paradigms, except, as Henri Bergson famously suggests (1911, 308-310, 363; 1988, 188-195), in spatialised terms. Time is represented in terms of a series of regular and regulated points along a line in space. For Grosz, this spatialised representation of time operates in concert with what Michel Foucault would call “power regimes” (Grosz 1996, 16). It suppresses the force of time, suppresses the eruption of unforeseeable events, unforeseeable thoughts, actions and interactions. It provides, instead, for positive, controlled forms of growth, change, creativity and innovation, which follow a logical, linear progression from thought to thought, idea to idea, act to act. It in fact serves, as Heathfield suggests, to subdue time’s volatility, and set up a preferred future (2000, 108).

Understandably, some political discourses—Grosz names Marxism, feminism and postcolonialism—have tied their concept of revolution to this historical, chronological time, so that their ideas of progress and political transformation follow “a predesignated path, innovation within legitimated parameters, that is, controlled and regulated progress (whether the rule of the proletariat, the equalization of the sexes, or racial integration)” (1999b, 17). In such political discourses, Grosz says, the future is planned, mapped, programmed. More recently, however, philosophers like Nietzsche, Bergson, Heidegger and Deleuze have rejected this limited, limiting notion of progress and revolution (Grosz 1999a, 3; 2005, 129, 176). For these philosophers, time is defined not so much by a trajectory from point to point as by a series of deviations, or disruptions, which have the potential to thwart predictable trajectories, in the process producing something that is truly new. These philosophers thus articulate a more abstract approach to the politics of gender, race and class (Grosz 1999a, 173), bound up in the notion of ‘becomings’ that that are normally considered “too destabilising, too difficult to direct into concerted political pathways to provide the basis of a new politics” (Grosz 1999a, 171-2). They try to harness the active, dynamic, differentiating force of time to create less predictable sorts of physical, social and political change.

In an essay in the recent *Not Even a Game Anymore* edition on Forced Entertainment’s work, Florian Malzacher (2004) has identified a comparable division between programmed and non-programmed approaches to time, change and political transformation in twentieth century performance. Content-based theatre traditions from Aristotle to Brecht have, Malzacher argues, depended on programmed change in chronological, historical time for their political impact (2004, 132-3). Such theatres give spectators a set of characters, and a narrative perspective on what happens to these characters, why, and with what consequences. They ask spectators to identify with the characters’ predicaments, choices and (positive or negative) consequences, and to take what they have learned on board in their own actions outside the theatre, whether via Aristotelian catharsis or the more activist interventions Brecht

was after (Malzacher 2004, 132-3) In this way, they program a future, or a set of possible futures, for both characters and spectators. Malzacher is suspicious of such programmedness, suggesting that “even Brecht’s notion of the theatre as a model for actions in the outside world does not work anymore” (Malzacher 2004, 132). These programmed sorts of performance can be, as Blau suggests, “still too rational and predictable. Even in their spontaneities there is impoverished play . . . [A] lack of spinoff” (1982, 7).

According to Heathfield, another commentator on the work of Forced Entertainment, the philosophical/political dimension of contemporary performance has started to depend more and more on doing something strange to time, memory, history and identity since the Happenings of the 1950s and 1960s (2000, 107). Artists have started to challenge the narrative dimension of Western drama to which audiences are accustomed. They make snippets of different stories; ideas and images collide. They repeat strange, seemingly unrelated acts again and again and again. They shrink, stretch and layer these acts to the point that it is difficult for the spectators to bear without distraction, distress and boredom. They start to break down the sense of performers and spectators being part of a rehearsed, fictional structure bound to proceed along predetermined lines. A breakdown that takes place sometimes with, and sometimes without, a metacommentary that frames what they are doing. This, Malzacher contends, means the audience really cannot “distill a model that might be transferred to the outside world” (2004, 133). Past, present and future possibilities are still in the frame, but these possibilities are not mapped, modelled or programmed as they might have been in previous political/activist practices. Rather, artists work with duration and differential repetition to make the ‘language’ of performance stammer, vibrate, tremble and sing as Deleuze and Guattari might put it (1994, 174-6), to move from a language of concepts and characters to one of sensations. Spectators are part of the performance, moved by the performance, by the sense of tension, exhaustion or exhilaration it produces (Malzacher 2004, 125).

Whilst it would be a mistake to dismiss the potential of narrative models to produce political transformations, Grosz’s and Malzacher’s comments on the part temporal manipulations play in a programmed or non-programmed politics do nevertheless provide an interesting lens through which to examine the aesthetic and political impact of Forced Entertainment’s work. In particular, they have the potential to help theorise Forced Entertainment’s attempts, in works like *Bloody Mess*, to provoke experiential, emotional and intellectual reactions from audiences, without fully programming the form these reactions might take.

### **Forced Entertainment**

Founded in Sheffield in 1984, and led by writer-director Tim Etchells, Forced Entertainment is a group of artists who have spent more than twenty years devising work across a range of theatrical and digital media (Forced Entertainment 2006) Amongst other things, Forced Entertainment are interested in the interaction between actor and audience here, now, together: interactions that are, as I suggested in my introduction, basic to the theatre. Forced Entertainment have always had what Etchells describes as a love-hate relationship with the linear narrative structures that dominate much Western drama (in Heathfield 2004, 88). These structures create drama, tension, through the unfolding of a start-middle-end story “that produces a satisfactory feeling of closure” (in Heathfield 2004, 80) a satisfactorily clear moral spectators can “get” (Etchells 2004, 225) and carry forward into the future. Although these structures “are what makes meaning possible” (in Heathfield 2004, 88), and are the preferred storytelling mode of Western audiences, Forced Entertainment’s works question their relevance, and the reasons for our attachment to them. This has led to a longstanding emphasis on challenging, disrupting and defamiliarising narrative conventions in Forced Entertainment’s work.

In the early years, Patricia Beneke says, Forced Entertainment's work was characterised by the sort of stylised, repetitive choreography seen with European practitioners like Pina Bausch (Beneke 2004, 27). What Beneke describes (2004, 42) as their deconstructions of film and T.V. genres—the ush-erette's absorption into the films she sees in *Jessica in the Room of Lights* (1984), the gangland interrogations in *The Set Up* (1985), the American bar scenes in *Nighthawks* (1985) for instance—were also frequently framed by cinematic techniques and technologies (Malzacher and Helmer 2004, 13-14). As Forced Entertainment evolved, their work was increasingly characterised by collage, by the continual, brutal, collision and juxtaposition of ideas, images, languages and things, often drawn from T.V., film newspapers, diaries, and letters (Etchells in Heathfield 2004; Malzacher and Helmer 2004, 16). Etchells suggests that if spectators can interpret the dozens of different T.V. channels that provide the backdrop to domestic life today, they can interpret the swift channel-switching collage of Forced Entertainment's theatre too. "[N]ever one story in our theatre; always two, three, four or many" he says (Etchells 1999, 96; Malzacher and Helmer 2004, 18). In time, Forced Entertainment's "mega-mix method" (Etchells in Heathfield 2004, 78) gave way to more focused explorations of singular strands and themes, and "the visible use of technology that marked many of the pieces in the 1990s decreased and faded" (Malzacher and Helmer 2004, 18).

In the latest works—and particularly the durational works like the 6-12 hour *12am: Awake and Looking Down* (1993), the six hour *Speak Bitterness* (1994), the six hour *Quizoola!* (1996), the 24 hour *Who Can Sing a Song to Unfrighten Me* (1999), and the six hour *And on the Thousandth Night* (2000)—Forced Entertainment has created a number of durational works, including In the latest works, and particularly in the durational works, Forced Entertainment has developed a new relation to the temporal structures that dominate Western drama, and make meaning possible. As performer Terry O'Connor puts it, the struggle to tell the story becomes the story (in Beneke 2004, 44). The performers play out acts, questions, quizzes, confessions and competitions again and again, repeating them, trying to get them right, their physicality getting "rougher and more ragged" (O'Connor in Beneke 2004, 35), the risk of failure getting more and more apparent. Although the performers are still inside a more or less scripted theatrical "machine", in some of these works they are less protected by the architecture of conventional plot and pace, and their own actions, choices and contributions are more on show (Etchells in Heathfield 2004, 80; see also Matzke 1994, 178; Helmer 2004, 52; and Malzacher and Helmer 2004, 20). They are in fact falling back on the basics of theatrical performance—act, and actor, present here and now before an audience, coping with the risk of failure, confusion, deviation, distraction, meaninglessness (Etchells 2004, 227). They are, in Malzacher and Helmer's words,

bringing to the fore the foundation of theatre itself . . . What does it mean to be onstage; what does it mean to sit in the dark auditorium; how does one grab attention and build it up, either to create a turning point or a false lead (2004, 14).

### ***Bloody Mess***

*Bloody Mess*, as Etchells wrote in the program for the season at the Malthouse theatre in Melbourne, is a work that revolves "around action or the choreographic, rather than the textual" (2005a). It revolves around a series of acts in time, seemingly random, unrelated, but still meaningful and important to the performers who spend more than two hours struggling to realise them without being interrupted, thwarted, failing. The dominant aesthetic in *Bloody Mess* is one of confusion, collision and disconnection, in which the "characters and strands in the work [are] there to collide with each other, rather than all become the same thing" (Etchells 2005a). Certainly, there is no sense of "shared understanding" amongst the characters in the show: the roadies hoping to be seen as romantic heroes (Richard Lowdon, Robin Arthur); the clowns hoping to be seen as funny (Bruno Roubicek, John Rowley); the

woman in a gorilla suit who wants to be seen as the one we desire (Claire Marshall); along with actors who want to be seen as star of the show (Jerry Killick), enigmatic (Cathy Naden), bubbly (Wendy Houstoun), symbolic (Davis Freeman), or as a real person, doing real things (Terry O'Connor). As becomes apparent early on in *Bloody Mess*, when each performer lays out what the audience should expect from them, “most of the personas seem to have quite a different idea of what is meant to happen and what would be a good outcome” (Etchells 2005a).

Each persona has a set of acts, a pattern they perform again and again throughout *Bloody Mess*, often to pounding rock music. These patterns connect, compete and clash with what others are doing, often, as reviewer Kate Herbert noted, at the most inappropriate moments (2005, 83). They are layered, framed and reframed over the course of the performance to the point that the meaning starts to drain from them, making them seem strange, comic, discomforting, pointless.

A woman (Terry) weeps and wails and grieves (Etchells 2005a) at the sight of another persona prostrate midstage, runs forth, throws water in her face for tears, throws the cup aside, runs to the rear wall, starts again. Her movements get more stylised, aggressive, sexualised. She runs from side to side, back to front, throws whole bottles of water over herself, swings a blanket about, undresses, dresses, starts again, her actions punctuated by sobs and later by laughter.

Another woman (Claire) declares herself the most desirable, dons a gorilla suit, and then stops the show periodically to check spectators are “still thinking about you fucking me, and me fucking you”, and to scatter things (popcorn, nuts, lollies, tissues) across the stage.

A clown (John) tries to tell us what Seattle reviewer Misha Berson described as a “dark, existential, Beckettesque” story (2005, C8) about the beginning of the Earth, the big bang, profound silence, impenetrable blackness, and something called ‘potentiality.’ “What potentiality is all about,” he says, “is it’s all about things waiting to happen, on the brink of happening, on the verge of happening, but not yet happening. Things queuing up to happen, waiting their turn, taking their place, but not yet happening”. But the potential his story has to happen is perpetually interrupted by a cheerleader’s shouts, notes from another clown, help from two roadies. He tries again and again to get back into the story, and eventually to take it from the top, but it is lost in pounding music, and in the other performers’ movements, as they return to their patterns, or perform what he has been describing, cardboard stars and streamers contributing to the mess onstage. By this stage, as reviewer Helen Thompson says, the other performers are “pull[ing] out every theatrical trick in the book, from lavish use of the smoke-machine to nudity” (2005a, 8), but it’s not quite clear if they are sincerely helping or sabotaging the story.

Another woman (Cathy), a drama queen in smudged red make up and satin sets up the profundity of the stage death she is about to perform for us. ‘In a moment I’m going to lie down, and when I do you’re going to be overwhelmed,’ she says. ‘When I lie down you are going to start to cry and you are never going to stop for the rest of your lives.’ Moving into position, she continues, ‘. . . I just want to make it clear why this is sad. It’s because of my frailty . . . my weakness . . . your own weakness . . . And now you can look if you dare.’ And then, of course, ‘shit, shit, shit . . . I completely fucked that up, my timing is just rubbish.’

A cheerleader (Wendy) tries to take the focus off her, finding different strategies to coax us to tears.

A pair of clowns fight. ‘I’m still funny, aren’t I?’ the loser asks.

A pair of men, naked but for their silver covered cardboard stars, decide it’s a good time for a really beautiful silence, something all can do together (something seen before in Forced Entertainment’s

*Pleasure* (1998); see Etchells 1999, 108). The sort of silence that happens as a baby stops crying, as a child makes a wish, as you accidentally hit mute on the T.V., as an astronaut drifts away into space, as a car crash survivor asks ‘is everyone all right,’ as you get down on your knees to ask God for hope, as you turn off someone’s life support. But in the face of interruptions, and roadies pushing for digital timing of the beautiful silence, it too falters, “mutilated by everyone else” (Herbert 2005, 83).

The clown John tries to tell us another story. Not about the potentiality that exists at the beginning of the world, but about the inevitability of the end of the world. His story (or, rather, his attempt at a story) points to the twin poles of order and chaos, creation and destruction, that, according to John Bailey, dominate *Bloody Mess* (2005, 4). It points, Dominic Cavendish concurs, to the disconcerting possibility that “the universe was not ‘created’ but formed through bits of matter colliding—a process akin to that of the show we’re watching” (2004, 22).

What all the personas’ acts seem to have in common is indeed a sense of potentiality interrupted, divested, diverted, redirected into other stories and situations, never really realised in the way they promise to be. “Over and over, people attempt to realize seemingly futile dreams; be what they are not; bring about change—beauty, even. But over and over, the attempts are upstage or thwarted” (Brennan 2004, 15). As each character struggles to complete their action, their stories collide, bringing competition, rivalry, confusion, chaos. As Etchells explains in the program, “[i]t’s about the collision of different worlds and personas—collision at which sparks fly, collisions that can be both comical and disturbing . . .” (2005b); “[I]t’s not so much about fighting as about the way all these people onstage find these playful ways to interrupt and mutate what they’re doing to meet or not quite meet what others are doing” (2005a).

It is the unpredictability of these meetings, mutations and sparks that prevents spectators narrativising the show: “[T]he show has these moments of perfect composition,” as Etchells says, “but they’re temporary, snatched away, mutated into something else, torn up, forgotten” (2005b). What starts to feel most inevitable to spectators is interruptions to the flow of things—a roadies’ help, a clown’s horn, a woman’s sobs, a cheerleader’s shouts.

### **Act, actor, audience and time**

*Bloody Mess* is not one of Forced Entertainment’s durational pieces, where the performers’ personality and improvisational skill is so forcibly drawn into play. As Bailey notes, “*Bloody Mess* in fact features very little that isn’t tightly planned and rehearsed” (2005, 4). The performers’ path through the space and time of the show is scripted. The indeterminacy they face comes from the repetition, differential repetition, and connection with the fragmented, multiplicitous force of duration that is part of all theatrical performance, and is pushed to further extremes by the excessive repetitions characteristic of contemporary performance and dance. The spectators’ path through the space and time of the show, though, is not scripted. This is (presumably) their first experience during and enduring the disrupted, disjunctive, chaotic texture of the show as it unfolds in time. The audience is not, Etchells says, made to feel responsible for “the craziness and disconnection that’s happening onstage” (2005a), not made to feel that it is the problem, the way it is in some of Forced Entertainment’s shows. In *Showtime* (1996), or in *First Night* (2001), for instance, Forced Entertainment set out not simply to give the audience time, silence, the sense of a moment that is full of possibilities—funny, poignant, exciting, exhausting, bereft, empty (Etchells 2004, 226)—but to

[s]plit the audience. Make a problem of them. Disrupt the comfort and anonymity of the darkness... Make the audience feel the differences present in the room and those outside of it (class, gender, age, race, power, culture). Give them the taste of sitting and laughing

alone. The feel of a body that laughs in public and then, embarrassed, has to doubt its action.

Give them gifts. Pleasures. Laughs. Dances. Bring them 'together' again (Etchells 2004, 225).

This said, in *Bloody Mess* the audience still has to negotiate energy, potentiality, and exhaustion, along with the "confrontational, uncomfortable or just plain boring moods, moments and ideas" (Etchells 204, 224) that characterise Forced Entertainment's performance. It is not so much that Forced Entertainment sets out to create boredom, fatigue, discomfort, Etchells says, as that they toy with these sensations, and with the audience, in a deliberate and measured way (Etchells in Heathfield 2004, 97). And, certainly, I was confronted with my own wavering between interest and boredom during *Bloody Mess*. I felt a sense of being mesmerised by something going on for so much time, missing something going on at the same time, waiting for something to happen or to happen again. A sense of it being too much to take in within a single moment. A sense of duration, of growing discomfort with the duration, mechanical repetition, repetition mutating into something else rather than following the promised path towards extremity, exhaustion, finish. A growing sense of awareness of things going on around me in the audience as well as onstage, as I lost focus on the action, slipping instead into contemplation of the pleasure, laughter, confusion and discomfort of those around me. A sense of the comedy becoming sadder, darker, and more bitter as I started to think about how these seemingly banal actions and interactions might be linked back to larger ideas about contemporary existence.

About twenty minutes before *Bloody Mess* finally finishes, the dominant feeling is one of fatigue, the personas playing out their patterns slowly, quietly, sluggishly, singularly. The sound has fallen away. They are so tired that Terry's sobs have become laughter. 'This is the serious bit,' the roadie says. 'Since when has this been the serious bit?' the clown John challenges. 'This is the funny bit at then end.' But not haha funny now. The clown struggles to tell the story of the End of the World, still interrupted, thwarted. The cheerleader captures the frustration that even the inevitable, the end, is inevitably interrupted. 'Be more positive, John,' she shouts. 'Happy ending, John . . . C'mon finish it up, John, we're all waiting here . . . Get us to the end, John, just get us to the end . . . Finish it up John, finish the story.' And lost beneath the shouts the gorilla speaks of her lover, her audience's love of her: 'We're inside a piece of time that nobody else knows about . . . it's a secret . . . a secret piece of time.' Still the cheerleader shouts: 'Smash it up, John . . . Tiny little fragments . . . We're waiting for a decent finish.' 'Thank you Melbourne, and goodnight' he offers. 'Not an ending, John, that's not a decent finish . . . You can do better than that.' 'It's dust . . .' the clown sobs, 'it's just dust.'

As *Bloody Mess* finishes, the representational and the real increasingly collide, distort, become confused, as they do in a number of Forced Entertainment's shows (Etchells in Heathfield 2004, 225; Helmer 2004, 72). The performers offer commentary on the situation, replicating the spectators' own feelings as they reduce what they are seeing into a coherent set of sensations, thoughts and ideas. The show starts to push some of the spectators own thoughts back at them, providing a commentary on the experience of enduring it. 'Can't just sit here chatting all night. Someone's got to clean this shit up,' the clown John says, referring to the stage that has indeed become a bloody mess. The stage becomes stiller and stiller, the personas draw back, the lights start coming down, til at last the drama queen Cathy is left standing alone in the light. 'This is the last thing you see,' she says. 'You see me standing in the light . . . You don't know me . . . This is the final moment. This is the last light.'

This, for me, was a disconcertingly poignant finish to *Bloody Mess*. Having by this stage thwarted any expectation of a meaningful finish, the show seemed to find yet another way of thwarting my expectations by finishing on this surprisingly singular, sad and sentimental note. A strangely effective

collision between non-narrative and narrative that has, thinking back on my experience of *Bloody Mess*, only served to heighten my sense that the show is about a series of acts in time, a series of collisions, or provocations, rather than a coherent statement about humanity, hope, fear, the future.

Reviews show the mixed reaction to this ‘mess.’ Some reviewers, including reviewers of the production I saw in Australia in 2005, wrote that *Bloody Mess* reminded them of the theatrical anarchy and antagonism of groups like The Living Theater in the 1960s (Adcock 2005, E4), and devised theatre groups in the 1970s and 1980s (Thompson 2005, 15; Herbert 2005, 83). But younger spectators—too young to be familiar with 1960s, 1970s and 1980s practices except through scripts and spectator accounts—failed to see this reworking of “familiar” techniques (Thompson (2005, 15), and instead, I would suggest, delighted in the “postmodern irony” (Hutera 2004, 17 that they perceived in the chaotic, channel-switching nature of the work, suited, as Etchells say, to a channel-switching generation (Hewison 2004, 35; see Etchells 1999). They suggested the show, performed “tongue-in-cheek with style and skill” (Herbert 2005, 83) was not so easily reducible to a reworking of past techniques (Thompson 2005, 12). *Bloody Mess* did force spectators to think about what Forced Entertainment was doing, why, and what it could mean (Berson 2005, C8), and did, as reviewers in the United Kingdom and United States claimed, become “desperately” (Gardner 2004, 30), “achingly, ridiculously human” (Berson 2005, C8) in its display of the performers frailties, their desire to be centrestage in their own lives (Gardner 2004, 30). But this did not redeem *Bloody Mess* for one American reviewer, who said the sense of collision, channel-switching, without a clear point of reference, did provide a (too?) clever perspective on contemporary existence and the competing narratives of history, but that Forced Entertainment pushed their play with repetition, duration and temporal disruption too far—longer than it took to make their point, longer than the audience could be expected to endure (*The Western Mail* 2004, 30). Thus, at least one Australian reviewer listed *Bloody Mess* amongst the contributions to the 2005 Melbourne International Arts Festival that failed to communicate successfully with audiences (Thompson 2005b).

For me, though, the moments where *Bloody Mess* did indeed feel like what some reviewers described at an indulgent, excessive, endurance test, and where it did invoke the worst failures to connect and communicate, were also thoroughly interwoven with its impact, and its provocations. I found my own failure to get to comfortable terms with aspects of the piece—not least the double disjunction of the ending that initially seemed to me to wrap the colliding trajectories of this absurd, comic, chaotic mess together a little bit too neatly—the source of a host of interesting thoughts and ideas. This, to me, is where the impact, the impetus for new possibilities in spectators’ own thinking, starts to emerge with works that repeat, stretch, shrink, fracture and reframe a series of acts in time the way *Bloody Mess* does. Responses that are not programmed, but rather develop some of the unpredictable ‘potentiality’ that exists, as the clown John kept trying to tell us, in the unfolding of time.

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